



**Human Rights Council  
Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Kiribati 49<sup>th</sup> Session (January-February 2025)**

**Joint Stakeholders' Submission on:**

**Human Rights in Kiribati**

**Submitted by:**

**Marist International Solidarity Foundation (FMSI)**  
*(NGO in Consultative Status with ECOSOC)*

**Edmund Rice International (ERI)**  
*(NGO in Consultative Status with ECOSOC)*

and

**Marist Brothers Star of the Sea Province**

Geneva, October 2024

## INTRODUCTION

1. This stakeholders' report is a joint submission of the above-mentioned organizations. The report highlights key concerns related to **children's rights** in Kiribati, particularly **climate change, overpopulation, education and youth-social problems**. Each section conveys recommendations to the Kiribati Government.

2. The data and information obtained for this submission came from various sources and includes information from youth, teachers, educators, and other civil society actors living and working in Kiribati. All information concerned the period from March 2020 to September 2024.

3. **Marist International Solidarity Foundation (FMSI)** is an international organization promoted by the Marist Brothers, present in 80 countries. FMSI has more than 15 years of experience working in the field of international solidarity, advocating for children's rights especially in the field of education. It works at the international level, participating in the UN human rights mechanisms in collaboration with other organizations with similar interests. It has been accredited by ECOSOC since 2011.

4. **Edmund Rice International (ERI)** is an international non-governmental organization, founded in 2005 and with Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC since 2012. ERI is supported by two Catholic Religious Congregations, the Christian Brothers and the Presentation Brothers. It works with networks of like-minded organizations and in the countries where the two Congregations are present. ERI has a special interest in the rights of the child, the right to education and in eco-justice.

5. The **Star of the Sea Province** is the canonical entity through which the Marist presence in Kiribati is made present, under the blessing of the Roman Catholic Church Diocese of Tarawa-Nauru. The Diocese are the civil owner of the school. The Marist Brothers arrived in Kiribati in 1984. Marist Brothers plays the governance (administration) role of the school. A local Commission Group carries out this governance (administration) role on behalf of the Star of the Sea Province of the Marist Brothers. The Marist Brothers Star of the Sea governs St. Louis High School, which is an educational institution that is recognized by the Government of Kiribati and is owned by the Roman Catholic Church while it is governed (administered) by a local Commission group with the support of the local I-Kiribati Marist Brothers. The chair of the Commission group is a local I-Kiribati Marist Brother.

### I. GENERAL REMARKS AND COOPERATION WITH THE UPR MECHANISM

6. Kiribati was reviewed on 28 January 2020 at the 35th Session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review. This NGO coalition welcomes the constructive participation of Kiribati in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). On this occasion, Kiribati received 148 recommendations and supported 104 recommendations while noting 44 recommendations. The present joint submission represents the follow-up to the UPR recommendations accepted by the State in 2020.

7. The implementation of recommendations is critical in order to ensure a true advancement of human rights in the State under review. Therefore, Kiribati must pay particular attention to effectively follow-up those recommendations in consultation with Civil Society.

8. We thank the government of Kiribati for the opportunity to submit this report, as well as for its adherence to the measures proposed by the United Nations for the participation of civil society. We welcome the recommendations adopted on the occasion of the last UPR, as well as the country's efforts to implement these measures. At the same time, we are also aware of the need to further elaborate on the previous recommendations, as well as to address new ones that may arise at the next session.

## **II. METHODOLOGY FOR DATA COLLECTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE TOPIC**

### **Methodology:**

9. An important part has been carried out by listening to the direct voices of children, adolescents and young people, as well as adults directly involved in the lives of children and young people involving a group of 10 students, aged between 15 and 17, from educational establishments. In many of the themes, we highlight the coincidence in the opinions expressed by the children and the adults who accompanied them in the consultation and listening process. The main issues highlighted in this fieldwork are reflected in this report, although there were other concerns beyond those mentioned here.

### **Overview:**

10. **Climate change.** The consequences of climate change can be easily seen everywhere in the country. These consequences also have a direct impact on the lives of many people. It is enough to see how sea levels are rising, and how this leads to the forced displacement of some populations. These displacements also entail the loss of traditions, languages, dialects, cultures, etc., in addition to the economic difficulties that any forced displacement entails.

11. **Overpopulation.** One of the country's problems is overpopulation, particularly on the island of Tarawa, where much of the population is concentrated. It should be noted that the island is tiny, about 31 sq km in size. Much of the population from other islands is moving to this one, as it is the most well-serviced. This overpopulation in Tarawa has some advantages, but it also presents some difficulties.

12. **Education.** The aim is to strengthen the country's education system, asking the State to take measures to this end. It is considered necessary for all young people in Kiribati to have access to the education system, especially university, as this will favour adult life, full development and economic independence.

13. **Youth problems.** The country's young people report numerous problems they face in childhood, adolescence and early youth. Among these problems, we can highlight the following:

14. **Teenage pregnancy.** The number of teenage pregnancies is perceived as an important situation, especially because of the repercussions that this has for adolescent girls. The higher number of pregnancies means an increase in the number of births, although this is not supported by an increase in aid, which leads to a poorer quality of life for newborns, as well as implying a possible increase in infant mortality.

15. **Drugs.** Drug use and abuse is increasing, especially among school children and young people. There is also particular concern about the increase in young people, still of school age, transporting and distributing drugs, especially in areas close to schools.

16. In addition, children and young people are increasingly concerned about other issues that directly affect them and their families. Many aspects of human rights are interconnected so that when one fails, other rights are also threatened. Therefore, other concerns can be heard in the voices of children and young people that are less developed in this report: Law enforcement, loss of identity and culture, concern for the future...

17. Kiribati protects with laws and public policies the human rights. We are aware that some of the challenges facing the government are not easy to work on, so we appreciate the efforts to improve them, now and in the future. We are also aware that some of the challenges presented to the government are not easy to work on, and we appreciate efforts to improve them, now and in the future.

18. The issue of greatest concern is climate change. It is undoubtedly the most relevant issue in Kiribati and contributes to other problems perceived and felt by young people. An effective response to climate change, by the government and neighboring and cooperating states, can also contribute to the improvement of other concerns.

### III. CLIMATE CHANGE

19. There is deep concern about the state of **climate change** and its consequences: rising sea levels, lack of living space, insufficient space to grow vegetables, forced displacement, overpopulation... Some of these aspects are reflected in a separate section.

20. As a coalition we join, and welcome, the adoption of the measures accepted in the last UPR report, in particular in its numbers 80.45<sup>1</sup> and 80.46<sup>2</sup>. We consider both recommendations to be essential, as well as timely measures for their implementation. We are also aware of the need to involve not only the State but also other countries and the international community.

21. The situation in Kiribati remains dire, as the nation faces severe threats from rising sea levels and climate change. Reports from international agencies like the UNFCCC underscore that Kiribati is one of the most vulnerable countries globally. The National Adaptation Plan, published in 2021,

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<sup>1</sup> 80.45 Intensify efforts to secure support and assistance from the international community in pursuing its climate change adaptation and mitigation plans (Vanuatu).

<sup>2</sup> 80.46 Continue to promote sustainable economic and social development and to strengthen the capacities of responding to climate change and natural disasters (China).

outlines measures to combat these challenges, including the need for urgent international cooperation. Youth in Kiribati express profound concern over the potential loss of their homeland and cultural identity due to climate change. The involvement of children and young people in climate advocacy is growing, emphasizing the need for global action to secure their future.<sup>3</sup>

22. The concerns of the country's children and young people on this point are many. They themselves highlight the reality of "global warming", "rising sea levels", problems of "coastal erosion", "water scarcity", "loss of biodiversity" and "droughts". From these points, we could make other "recommendations". This element is in line with the recommendation accepted by the State on the participation of civil society and non-governmental organizations<sup>4</sup>.

23. When we talk about climate change and its consequences, we tend to focus on the most obvious aspects (natural disasters, loss of biodiversity, etc.). These aspects are essential and need to be given greater attention, with more resources invested, both nationally and internationally, as mentioned elsewhere in the report.

24. There are also other essential and equally important aspects, which are particularly worrying in the case of Kiribati. The children and young people who participated in the preparation of this report were very clear and forceful in this regard. They expressed great concern about the possibility of losing their country (physical space) to rising sea levels. It should be noted that, for example, on the island of Tarawa, the highest point above sea level is 3 metres.

25. Alongside this loss of physical space, there are other, perhaps more important and significant losses. Of particular concern is the possible loss of traditions, culture, identity and language. These are losses that would be irreparable if they were to occur. For this reason, we urge the State of Kiribati, neighbouring countries and the entire international community to take action.

**26. In order to fight climate change and its consequences for the population, we make some recommendations to the government of Kiribati to:**

- a. Planting vegetation to prevent shoreline erosion (mangroves) and constructing sea walls.**
- b. Involving the UN in concrete climate change measures.**
- c. Establish a joint action plan, between the State of Kiribati and the United Nations, with concrete measures, timing, allocated resources, etc., to ensure the culture and identity of the Kiribati people.**

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<sup>3</sup> The National Adaptation Plan (2021) specifically details Kiribati's strategy to increase resilience against climate change. It emphasizes the need for integrating climate adaptation into national planning across all sectors, including water resource management and agricultural practices, which are critical given the rising sea levels and the threat to arable land.

<sup>4</sup> 80.49 Work with national non-governmental organizations, particularly non-governmental organizations led by women, when formulating and implementing mitigation and adaptation plans to combat climate change (Haiti).

#### IV. OVERPOPULATION

27. As stated in the Kiribati Joint Implementation Plan for Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management 2019-2028, the country has limited land area that exacerbates overpopulation issues. This intensifies the strain on resources, including housing, agriculture, and healthcare services. The large distances between islands further complicate access to essential services, highlighting the critical need for improved infrastructure and international support.

28. The size of the country as well as its growing population means that there is less and less space to live, especially on the main island of Tarawa. This fact makes it necessary to take measures to improve the welfare of the people, as accepted in recommendation 80.61<sup>5</sup>. We agree that this task also requires international co-operation and support, both from individual countries and from the international community.

29. This overpopulation in the country has several consequences that affect the entire population and is a concern for the younger generations, who see their future compromised. The lack of space to have a home to live in, and the lack of places for agriculture and livestock farming are challenges, as well as the lack of space for the construction of buildings for medical services<sup>6</sup> for the population. This is compounded by the large distances between the islands, making mobility and access to basic services difficult, along the lines proposed in recommendation 80.54<sup>7</sup> (and also 80.65; 80.66; 80.68) that access to health services should be for the entire population.

30. One of the consequences of the high population density, particularly in Tarawa, is the fact that diseases can spread more easily among the population. If diseases are more easily transmitted, more medical services will be needed, and this will mean more financial and human resources to cope with the situation.

31. As a coalition we want to add one more point, which is also affected by overpopulation. This is public transport in general, and school transport in particular. As the population grows, there is a new need for more frequent and better transportation services to facilitate the movement and mobility of people. A better public transport network, in the broadest sense of the term, promotes mobility and thus reduces travel times. As a coalition, we believe that it is important to take this into account, since the reduction of travel time allows people to have more time (for rest, socialising, leisure, etc.).

**32. To address the overpopulation problems, we recommend the Government of Kiribati to:**

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<sup>5</sup> 80.61 Continue to consolidate, with international support and cooperation, the implementation of social protection programmes to improve the well-being and quality of life of its people (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela).

<sup>6</sup> 80.64 Continue to strengthen measures to ensure equal access to health services for all, while giving special attention to the needs of children, women and the elderly (Timor-Leste).

<sup>7</sup> 80.54 Ensure adequate health services for the entire population, especially during extreme weather events (Luxembourg); and 80.65 Accelerate the delivery of quality health services, including to rural areas (Vanuatu); and 80.66 Continue to strengthen measures to ensure that the entire population has equal access to health services, particularly regarding the needs of children, women and the elderly (Algeria); and 80.68 Continue to give priority to the right to health, and implement effective measures to continue expanding access, as well as improving the quality of health-care services throughout its territory (Cuba).

- a. **Improve living conditions in other islands, so people could go/stay.**
- b. **The development and creation of artificial land, which can increase living space.**
- c. **Establish international agreements with other neighbouring countries so that part of the population, those who so wish, can settle with sufficient guarantees to maintain their culture, traditions, language...**

## **V. EDUCATION**

33. Our coalition wants to join the efforts of the State of Kiribati in the field of education. On the occasion of the last UPR, the government accepted some measures on this issue. After actively listening to a group of adolescents and young people, we join their voices in recognising the elements that have been improving in recent years, and we also invite the State to continue implementing policies that will improve the country's education system, and all that goes with it.

34. One of the most repeated aspects, as a necessity, on the part of the young people is related to the level of English, which is necessary to communicate with tourists, to strengthen relations and communication between locals and foreigners, to open up possibilities for the future... The children described it as "English illiteracy", showing their concern about this issue.

**35. In order to improve the educational situation in the country, our coalition suggests the following recommendations:**

- a. **Facilitating training for the unemployed, especially in traditional jobs.**
- b. **Increase the public transport and the school buses, to facilitate mobility and travel to educational resources.**
- c. **Establish specialised centres for the learning and use of English, accessible to the entire population, especially in poorer or more remote sectors of the country.**
- d. **Implement more educational programmes that support school dropouts to return to the education system and/or complete their studies as adults.**
- e. **Facilitating training courses for adults to help them get a better job.**

## **VI. YOUTH AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

36. There are a number of issues raised by children and young people in this section. These points are viewed with concern, although they are also aware that the Kiribati government is taking some positive steps. They thank the authorities for this fact and also invite them to continue to improve public services that will lead to a better quality of life.

37. Family Life Education is a challenge, which is compounded by issues such as overpopulation and the effects of climate change. As a coalition, we welcome the acceptance, in the last UPR, of the recommendations of several states on this issue, with the implementation, within the school

system, of more established sex and family education. We join recommendations 80.70 and 80.71<sup>8</sup>, accepted by Kiribati. It is particularly important to implement these education plans within the school curriculum, as suggested by the State of Fiji in recommendation 80.75<sup>9</sup>.

38. In the same vein, teenage girls' pregnancies are particularly worrying, according to adolescents and young people. The young people themselves consider it essential to work to improve access to reproductive and sexual education, in line with recommendations 80.80 y 80.81<sup>10</sup>. From such pregnancies, often unwanted, arises the situation of early marriages.

39. Another sincere concern of the young people consulted is drug use, affecting the health of people, particularly young people (especially marijuana). According to the children and young people themselves, this is a relatively new and increasingly frequent situation. The issue of drugs was not directly addressed in the recommendations made to Kiribati in the last UPR report. We therefore consider it particularly important that this point be taken into account, in order to put in place the appropriate measures (education, fight against drug trafficking...).

40. In a similar vein, concern is also reported about the abuse of alcoholic beverages among the population, and the consequences that this behaviour has on the population. This abuse, in addition to harming the health of those who consume it, also harms society through the increase in violence that is generated, whether within or outside the family environment.

41. The use and abuse of substances, mentioned in the two previous paragraphs, affect the emotions and development of all people, although it is especially significant in adolescents or young people, since it is at this age that these types of behaviour are acquired. They are particularly concerned about the use of marijuana among their own age group.

42. The use and abuse of narcotic substances can lead, in many cases, to various problems contrary to human rights. Our coalition advocates working on official protection policies in all spheres of society, particularly in educational environments. In this way, the future of the next generations could be prevented from being compromised.

**43. For the sake of those who suffer youth problems, and so that this fact is not an impediment to their further full development as individuals, we would like to invite and propose to the government of Kiribati to:**

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<sup>8</sup> 80.70 Revise the Family Life Education curriculum to bring it into line with the updated United Nations technical guidelines on sexuality education and integrate it into all school curricula, including both in junior and senior high schools (Slovenia); and 80.71 Incorporate a comprehensive approach to sexual and reproductive health in the National Development Plan for 2021–2025, which includes accessible family planning programmes, allowing the reduction of the high level of adolescent pregnancies (Uruguay).

<sup>9</sup> 80.75 Revise the Family Life Education curriculum to bring it into line with the updated United Nations technical guidelines on sexuality education and ensure the necessary resources and training for its full and effective implementation in schools (Fiji); Other recommendations along the same lines include 80.76, 80.77, 80.78...

<sup>10</sup> 80.80 Work to improve access to sexual and reproductive services, information and education (New Zealand); And 80.81 Include support for appropriate sexual and reproductive health and rights programmes and steps to develop comprehensive sexuality education programmes in the sexual and reproductive information and education efforts (New Zealand).



- a. **Establish a National plan for families. Education in schools and families to prevent early pregnancies.**
- b. **Facilitating and ensuring access to education for pregnant girls**
- c. **Establish life-skills training courses for adults, children and young people. These courses should be provided online, with various modules (drugs, alcohol, rights, duties, etc.).**

## **VII. DIRECT VOICES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

44. We would like to bring to this report, albeit briefly, some direct voices of children and young people when talking about the situation of rights in Kiribati. These voices reaffirm the theoretical work that has been carried out by the organisations presenting the report, the result of interaction and listening to children, adolescents and young people, as well as groups of adults directly related to the lives of minors.

45. Some of the contributions have already appeared during the report, but we think it is interesting to specify the richness of the direct voices of the next generations of Kiribati. We understand that they are the future of the country, and we know that they will be responsible for their own future. For this reason, with the consultation work, we also wanted to work on the participation and protagonism of children and young people, giving them a direct voice in the drafting of the report. From this desire, the "between quotes" of the report, and the contributions explained below, arise.

### **46. Climate Change:**

- We are concerned about a number of issues: "global warming", "rising sea levels", problems of "coastal erosion", "water scarcity", "loss of biodiversity" and "droughts".
- We are particularly concerned about the possibility of "losing our country", "our traditions, culture, identity and language".
- We consider it important that the United Nations "collaborate on concrete measures" to combat climate change.

### **47. Overpopulation:**

- "The lack of space to have a home to live in".
- "Buildings for medical services".
- "Better transportation services".
- "Improve living conditions in other islands, so people could go or stay there"

### **48. Education:**

- Difficulty in "communicating with tourists" due to "English illiteracy".
- "Facilitate training for the unemployed, especially in traditional jobs".
- "Increase public transport and school buses".

### **49. Youth and social problems:**

- "Teenage pregnancy" and "early marriages".
- "Particularly concerned about the use of marijuana..."

## I. CONCLUSION

50. As members of Civil Society, we would like to thank the Government of Kiribati for accepting recommendation 80.47<sup>11</sup>, which proposes to work in a coordinated way with other areas of life, as we understand that these aspects presented cannot be separated as watertight compartments.

51. Likewise, we find recommendation 80.53<sup>12</sup> particularly suggestive, due to the proposed involvement of the entire community (inhabitants of the country). In this sense, our report aims to be a response to this involvement of civil society, by listening to the voices of children and young people in the country.

52. Our coalition thank the government of Kiribati for its efforts to continue to listen to the voices of civil society, especially children and young people, and encourage it to continue to make its best efforts to improve the situation of rights in the country in all areas.

53. We are also grateful for the opportunity offered by the United Nations to participate through the UPR mechanism. Special thanks for allowing us to raise the direct voices of the children and young people with whom we have worked, reflected and drafted the report we conclude here.

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<sup>11</sup> 80.47 Adopt a comprehensive, gender-responsive and disability-inclusive approach to climate change adaptation and mitigation policies, consistent with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, to address the economic, cultural and social impacts and challenges that climate change presents, for the full and effective enjoyment of human rights for all (Fiji).

<sup>12</sup> 80.53 Continue to adopt an inclusive and participatory approach to the implementation of community-based climate adaptation initiatives (Philippines).