

Sunhak Peace Prize: Kiribati President Anote Tong Looks for a future in the midst of despair

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Shout out the global solution to Climate Change Propagation of the gravity of the environmental crisis faced by Pacific Ocean Island Nations

The Republic of Kiribati is an island nation located to the South East of Australia, faced with the fate of disappearing from the earth, and has been attracting the attention of the global community. This nation, which is only 0.36% (811km²) of the Korean Peninsula's area, is a subminiature nation made up of 33 islands. The average altitude above sea level is a mere 2m, and it faces the imminent threat of being submerged by 2050 due to the rise in sea levels caused by climate change. Together with the South Pacific's small nation of Tuvalu, which already has some parts of its lands submerged under the sea, they are both mentioned as representative cases of nations being submerged due to the aftermath of global warming.

Kiribati President Anote Tong has been consistently calling for the attention of the UN and other major international organizations toward climate change, and has been searching for a global resolution. He has worked especially toward spreading awareness on the gravity of the climate change crisis that is faced by smaller Pacific Rim nations with elevation levels that are lower than the average sea level. He has been widely recognized for standing on the frontline to establish a comprehensive consultative group with the participation of the global community.

He adopted the "Ambo Declaration" at the Kiribati Climate Change Agreement Conference held in 2010 where heads from each nation were invited. It is a declaration urging economic powers to investigate the cause of climate change and take concrete actions to reduce its negative influence on the environment. At the "United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change" (UNFCCC) held in Mexico during that same year, this declaration became the stepping stone for advanced economic nations to come to support nations like Kiribati who are vulnerable to climate change. The Sunhak Peace Prize Committee has explained, "President Tong is a global leader who has led the global community to agree on the dangers of climate change."

President Tong, who graduated from the London School of Economics in England is also a leader who knows how to sacrifice and defer the present for the sake of the future. Despite the hopeless situation, he stood as an example in fighting for the protection of the marine ecosystem for the future generations even that means making sacrifices.

At the World Conservation Headquarters Conference in 2006, President Tong declared the "Phoenix Islands Protected Area (PIPA)" to protect the Phoenix Islands, an oceanic coral archipelago ecosystem within his homeland. Furthermore, in 2008, he declared 400,000km² of marine area in the Phoenix Islands

as an “Ocean Conservation Park” where fishing and harvesting are prohibited. In 2010, this park was registered as the largest world heritage site by UNESCO.

He gave up the realistic benefits of his homeland. Establishing the neighboring seas as ocean conservation parks and protection areas limits some parts of the commercial fishing industry. This is because Kiribati depends greatly on the revenue made from charging the deep-sea fishing vessels for fishing rights, and the abundance of fish species in the Phoenix Islands are a vital source of income for the citizens of this nation. Furthermore, he also proposed the “Pacific Oceanscape.” This is a mutual cooperation network established by 23 small Pacific nations for the sustainable management of the Pacific Rim.

One characteristic of the “Pacific Ocean Landscape” is its extensive area which makes up 10% of the world’s ocean surface. Kiribati President Tong is also working on establishing and implementing a movement policy to protect the citizens who have to leave their homes due to climate change.

By purchasing the 240,000m² of surrounding Fiji land, and expanding settlements for citizens immigrating to other nations, they are given the opportunity to learn how to develop competitiveness for survival. For example, among the citizens who have completed nursing, sailing, gardening, hairstyling and other diverse vocational training programs, as well as various language education programs, the Sunhak Peace Prize Committee revealed that many of them have prepared new homes in South America and Asia. By opening the way for citizens to migrate to neighboring countries with dignity, actions were taken to free refugees from any restraints. This is also known as the “Immigration with Dignity” program.

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