

Kiribati leader visits Arctic on climate mission

September 20 2014, by Karl Ritter



In this photo made available by Greenpeace International, President Anote Tong of the Pacific Island nation Kiribati stands during a retreat to the high Arctic glacier Nordenskioldbreen, on Svalbard, Norway. Fearing that his Pacific island nation could be swallowed by a rising ocean, the president of Kiribati says a visit to the melting Arctic has helped him appreciate the scale of the threat. President Anote Tong on Saturday, Sept. 20, 2014 ended a Greenpeace-organized tour of glaciers in Norway's Svalbard Archipelago, a trip he said left a deep impression that he would share with world leaders at a U.N. climate summit next week in New York. (AP Photo/Greenpeace International, Christian Aslund)

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"It's a very fascinating sight. In spite of that, what I feel very deeply is the sense of threat," Tong said. "If all of that ice would disappear it would end up eroding our shores."

Scientists say the melt of Arctic glaciers is a key factor in the sea level rise that is threatening island nations such as Kiribati, an impoverished string of 33 coral atolls located about halfway between Hawaii and Australia. Many of its atolls rise just a few feet above sea level.

In a landmark report last year, the U.N.'s expert panel on climate change said oceans could rise by as much as 1 meter (3.3 feet) by the end of this century if no action is taken to cut the [greenhouse gas emissions](#) blamed for global warming. The summit in New York is meant to build momentum for a global agreement next year to cut emissions.

"It won't take a lot of [sea level rise](#) to affect our islands," Tong said. "We are already having problems."

Tong said he hopes his country won't have to be evacuated. Still, it has bought 20 square kilometers of land in Fiji as "an investment, a guarantee" in case part of the population has to be moved, he said.



In this photo made available by Greenpeace International, President Anote Tong of the Pacific Island nation Kiribati in front of glacier ice from the retreating glacier Sveabreen on Svalbard, Norway. Fearing that his Pacific island nation could be swallowed by a rising ocean, the president of Kiribati says a visit to the melting Arctic has helped him appreciate the scale of the threat. President Anote Tong on Saturday, Sept. 20, 2014 ended a Greenpeace-organized tour of glaciers in Norway's Svalbard Archipelago, a trip he said left a deep impression that he would share with world leaders at a U.N. climate summit next week in New York. (AP Photo/Greenpeace International, Christian Aslund)



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