Press release

For immediate release

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Government of Kiribati, Australia, and UNOPS celebrate completion of Tungaru Central Hospital coastal protection infrastructure to boost climate resilience

TARAWA, KIRIBATI – 23 October 2026 – Today, the Government of Kiribati, in partnership with the Government of Australia and UNOPS, proudly marked the official handover of the new coastal protection infrastructure at the Tungaru Central Hospital. The completion of Site 1 under the Kiribati-Australia Climate Security Initiative (KACSI) represents a major milestone in safeguarding the nation's critical health infrastructure from the escalating impacts of climate change.

As a low-lying atoll nation, Kiribati faces severe threats from rising sea levels and coastal erosion. The Tungaru Central Hospital is the country's primary referral hospital, providing essential medical care to the population. The newly completed coastal protection works reinforce approximately 250 metres of the existing seawall using geotextile sand containers, an innovative approach in Kiribati. Implemented by a local contractor using locally sourced materials and a trained local workforce, this solution combines effective coastal engineering with local capacity building, helping reduce coastal erosion and wave overtopping risks while strengthening the hospital's resilience.

The handover ceremony, held at Tungaru Central Hospital in Tarawa, was attended by **His Excellency Te Beretitenti, Taneti Maamau; the Australian High Commissioner to Kiribati, Mark Foxe**; members of the diplomatic corps; senior government officials from the Office of Te Beretitenti, the Ministry of Health and Medical Services and other government ministries; UNOPS representatives; and the project contractor, Sunlight Enterprises.

Speaking during the ceremony, HE Te Beretitenti, President of Kiribati, said: "Thirteen months ago, in September 2025, we stood on this exposed shoreline equipped only with technical plans and a shared resolution to protect the hospital from coastal erosion and

inundation. Today, we return to see that vision fully realized, with the completion of the geotextile seawall, officially commissioned as The Hospital Seawall."

The KACSI project is funded by the Government of Australia through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and implemented by UNOPS. The initiative focuses on delivering high-quality, sustainable infrastructure that protects physical assets and strengthens local communities' overall climate resilience.

The Australian High Commissioner to Kiribati, Mark Foxe, said: "This project demonstrates our support to the vision set out in KV20, which recognises climate resilience as essential to achieving a wealthy, healthy and peaceful nation. Australia is pleased to support Kiribati's development priorities and to work alongside the Government of Kiribati in building a safer and more resilient future." "Protecting this coastline helps safeguard vital infrastructure from coastal erosion and wave impacts, ensuring that health services can continue to support communities for years to come."

Throughout construction, UNOPS prioritized local capacity building. The project actively employed and trained local contractors, facilitating a transfer of knowledge and engineering skills that will remain within Kiribati long after the project's conclusion.

"When we look at these coastal protection works, we see much more than infrastructure. We see the protection of people, essential services and livelihoods." **said Patricia Cambronero, Project manager at UNOPS**. "But perhaps one of the most important achievements is the investment in local people. True resilience is not just built into infrastructure; it is built into people. Through this project, local workers have gained valuable technical skills and hands-on experience in climate-resilient construction. This knowledge will remain here in Kiribati, helping communities build and protect their future."

The ceremony concluded with the contractor's technical briefing, traditional performances, and a blessing of the site, marking a new chapter of security and resilience for the Tungaru Central Hospital.

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Notes to the editors:

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About KACSI: The Kiribati–Australia Climate Security Initiative (KACSI) is a climate adaptation project running from June 2023 to December 2027, aimed at protecting coastal areas in South Tarawa, Kiribati, from rising sea levels and erosion. The program is funded by the Australian Government and implemented in partnership with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), and the Government of Kiribati.

Pictures of the event:



Australian High Commissioner to Kiribati, Mark Foxe and His Excellency Te Beretitenti,, Taneti Maamau, President of Kiribati © UNOPS



His Excellency Te Beretitenti, Taneti Maamau. President of Kiribati, providing his speech © UNOPS



From Left to Right: UNOPS Project Manager, Patricia Cambronero Arribas; Australian High Commissioner to Kiribati, Mark Foxe; His Excellency Te Beretitenti,, Taneti Maamau, President of Kiribati; Sunlight Enterprises Contractor Manager, Roger Itaaka. © UNOPS



Geotextile Sand Container coastal protection infrastructure delivered at Tungaru Central Hospital © UNOPS