

MAIANA DISASTER

We are very sorry to report the worst ever maritime disaster in the history of Kiribati, which took place the week after the 30th Independence (2009) between Tarawa and Maiana.

According to the Commander of the Police Maritime service 55 persons were believed to have been on board the 17-meter double-hulled canoe when it capsized on a journey between Tarawa and Maiana, bound for Independence Day celebrations there. A total of 22 persons survived the incident, but 15 persons were confirmed dead and 18 are missing. Five people were able to swim ashore to raise the alarm.

Tessie Lambourne, Secretary for Foreign Affairs, emailed that:

'It was the most tragic maritime incident ever experienced. Everyone is still grappling with what happened and particularly those who lost loved ones. I still cannot believe that it actually happened. I was not here when bodies were found but I understand from descriptions that it was horrible finding decomposed bodies floating in the sea, some of which have lost limbs probably from sharks. I do hope that they died before the sharks attacked them. One of these bodies was of a pregnant woman and one of a baby, about one or two years old. It was horrible.

'The Beretitenti had all the survivors and bodies taken to his home in Teoraereke and families came to take their surviving or dead relatives home. On Tuesday this week, all flags were flown at half mast. The President is very distressed by all this.

'I am sure the Beretitenti would appreciate a message from you and the community during this difficult time'.

There was a special Memorial service in Tarawa on Friday 17th July. The following message from the UK I Kiribati Community was read out during the service:

'The I Kiribati Community in Britain and Ireland were deeply shocked to learn of the disaster between Tarawa and Maiana. We wish to express our great sorrow for the relatives of those who died or are still missing, and our best wishes for the speedy recovery of those who have survived. Our prayers are with you all today.

'Tia bon raoni ngkami naba mai ikai n ami rawawata. Baai aika aki kariaki ma tia karaua naba nanora iai n tatabemanira nako. Ai bon te katetekeraoi nakoia te koraki ake a taonnako waaia ao nakoia naba to koraki ake atiku imwia ma aia utu nako.'

The Beretitenti sent a personal message of gratitude to the UK community for their expression of solidarity during this difficult time.