

KMS Media Release 11th, June, 2014:

Clarification on Strong wind that affected Tarawa and maybe other Islands in Kiribati on the 11th June, 2014

General background information:

Kiribati entering its dry season now but noting the development of the El Niño events, the chance of experiencing rain is quite high and the forecast is to have Normal to Above Normal rainfall in the coming months. This means, high chances of observing clouds associated with rain, there is also a high chance to experience westerly wind and a slight increase in sea level from what normally happened. In contrast, during fine (sunny) days people might experience that it is quite hotter and that because of the warm pool (sea surface temperature) that has moved into the central and eastern Pacific where Kiribati is also located which is the sign of an El Niño event.

The warm pool usually enhances convection and cloud development which lead to continuous experience of rain most of the time. Apart from that, one of the key climate drivers known as the ITCZ also move further south from its normal position and therefore often sit over the Kiribati region especially over northern islands.

Wind details:

Easterly wind of 40 – 50 knots

Duration:

Incident happened for less than an hour from 12pm – 1pm

Caused:

The wind experienced is not a normal wind but the downdraft wind from a thunderstorm cloud which is known as a cumulonimbus (Cb) cloud, this was proved in the duration of this wind which only occurs for less than an hour.

In the stage where the thunderstorm cloud reached its mature stage, then it released its energy and that is known as downdraft. When this energy reached the Earth's surface it follows like normal wind.

Forecast:

Rain is expected to continue in the Kiribati region with chances of thunderstorm events so quite important for the public to understand chances of severe winds like what has been experienced from thunderstorm clouds.

History:

This is not the first time wind from thunderstorm clouds has been experienced in Kiribati, what has been reported over the radio a couple of months ago on the strong wind hitting Butaritari is a good example of this but is often experienced during rainy days and thunderstorms.