

PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT
on the occasion of the ECOSOC Special Meeting on

***Impacts of the 2015/16 El Niño phenomenon:
Reducing risks and capturing opportunities***

6 May 2016, UN Headquarters, New York

The Economic and Social Council convened a Special Meeting on “Impacts of the 2015/16 El Niño phenomenon: Reducing risks and capturing opportunities” at the request of the General Assembly on 6 May 2016.

As President of the Economic and Social Council, I am pleased to share the following key messages and recommendations that emerged from our discussions during the meeting.

- The El Niño phenomenon—with its increasing intensity—has lasting consequences for development. We heard the many serious social, economic, and environmental impacts of the 2015/16 El Niño. Extreme weather is affecting people’s lives, productive capacity, health and livelihoods.
- More than 60 million around the world have been impacted. People whose livelihoods depend on agriculture, fisheries and livestock are particularly affected. Some countries have lost arable farmable land. In Southern Africa alone, over 32 million people are affected by severe drought.
- In countries with ongoing high level of exposure and vulnerability to extreme climate events, in particular many of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), the compounding effect of the current El Niño phenomenon is adding further burden to their national and local capacity to manage risk and disasters. The impacts of the 2015/16 El Niño has also been particularly hard on the countries of Central America.
- During the special meeting on El Niño, we heard of the significant investments in preparedness, mitigation and risk reduction efforts undertaken by a number of countries. Strong risk-informed national planning efforts, budgeting for preparedness across sectors, coordinating local and national efforts, and strengthening early warning systems were highlighted. This is leading to a diversion of resources that could have been invested on achieving the SDGs.
- We also heard from donors and UN entities of support they provided to highly affected countries. There were also some innovations in releasing financing prior to events based on early warning information. The UN system should look to a coherent, coordinated and integrated approach in support and assistance to countries. The recent agreement among FAO, IFAD, OCHA and WFP to develop a protocol outlining steps to be taken collectively, within defined timelines, will help ensure early and coordinated responses to future El Niño and La Niña events.
- We heard how science, observatories and capacity building are helping to improve climate forecasts. While the physical signs of the 2015/16 El Niño event are weakening, it will continue to influence

climate patterns through the middle of 2016; and its socio-economic impacts will continue to strengthen till end of 2016. There are also signs that a La Niña event is likely to begin towards August 2016.

- I commend the regions and countries that have put in place longer term policies to initiate climate predictions through regional climate centres and have developed capacity to act on these predictions. As a result, they are experiencing lower impacts. Coordination at the national, regional and local levels and use of information and communication technology have been instrumental in an effective response. Political will at the highest level was also considered key to the success of these efforts.
- Our immediate priority must be to reduce the impact of the El Niño phenomenon by implementing the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change in a coherent and integrated manner. The importance of risk management was also underscored in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which calls for the development and implementation of a holistic disaster risk management at all levels. Risk reduction and resilience building efforts should also be part of the World Humanitarian Summit considerations and the New Urban Agenda of the Habitat III Conference.
- We must learn from the current El Niño phenomenon and set plans and strategies in order to prepare for and address the risks and impacts of future El Niños and the possibilities of La Niña.
- Food insecurity, malnutrition and hunger remain a concern. We must put in place early warning and early action systems for the agricultural sector, to reduce its vulnerability to the El Niño phenomenon. In addition, we need to establish social protection schemes and build capacity of national governments to mitigate and be prepared for future El Niños.
- We need effective measures to prevent the health consequences of El Niño conditions, which are expected to increase throughout 2016. These include increased levels of acute malnutrition associated with food insecurity and vulnerability to infectious diseases, as well as higher incidence of respiratory diseases due to wildfires and health stress caused by heat waves.
- We underline the importance of systematically evaluating, recording, sharing of information and publicly accounting for disaster losses in order to develop strategies and plans to address the impacts of future El Niños.
- Sustainable funding is necessary to build vulnerable people's long-term resilience to extreme weather events related to the El Niño phenomenon.
- We have to ensure that our development investments, public and private, are resilient and risk sensitive. Investments are required in long-term efforts to provide climate services that reduce the risk to extreme events. These investments should increase local and national preparedness capacity and resilience – particularly in the agriculture and food security, water and health sectors – in line with the Sendai Framework, the Paris Agreement and Agenda 2030.
- We must promote further development and investment in effective, nationally compatible, regional, multi-hazard early warning mechanisms, in line with the Global Framework for Climate services and facilitate the sharing and exchange of information among countries.
- Governments cannot deal with the El Niño phenomenon alone. Partnerships, that bring together all actors and help break silo approaches, would be indispensable. As the report of the Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit indicates, “ending need” would require reinforcing, not

replacing national system; anticipating, not waiting for crises; and transcending the humanitarian-development divide.

- We need a coordinated and comprehensive approach to addressing the economic, social and environmental dimensions of the El Niño phenomenon. The Economic and Social Council will continue to monitor the impact of the El Niño phenomenon and to promote coordination and coherence in the work of the United Nations development system.