



ECOSOC Special Meeting

Aftermath of recent hurricanes:

Achieving a risk-informed and resilient 2030 Agenda

24 October 2017

Hurricanes Irma, Harvey and Maria may be over, but the devastating impact they had on the countries in their path continues. Hurricane Irma, with the longest intensity as a category 5 ever recorded, has caused significant damage and disrupted people's lives. As of 19 September, at least 102 people were reported dead across territories affected by Hurricane Irma. Thousands have been displaced, infrastructure—such as power, telecommunications and water services—and homes damaged, livelihoods affected. Around 82 deaths have been attributed to Hurricane Harvey in Texas, faced with heavy flooding, power outages and evacuations. Maria affected many of the areas already devastated by Irma, causing particular widespread destruction in Dominica. The most severely affected areas include Anguilla, Barbuda, British Virgin Islands, Cuba, Dominica, Puerto Rico, Saint Martin, Sint Maarten, Saint Barthélemy, Turks and Caicos Islands and the United States Virgin Islands. The Commonwealth of Dominica, a small climate vulnerable state, lost a generation of development gains in a matter of hours. As of 6 October, Tropical Storm Nate led to flooding, landslides and high winds in Central America, resulting in more than 30 deaths and affecting 600,000 people in the region. The very recent earthquakes in Mexico in September, including the strongest in a century, had a devastating impact for the communities close to the quake's epicentre, taking the lives of over 400 people, destroying and damaging homes and infrastructure.

The United Nations system, together with partners, is helping countries to meet the needs of the most vulnerable people in the affected communities. As assessments continue, immediate needs identified concentrate in the sectors of health, water, sanitation and hygiene, food security, shelter and early recovery support to livelihoods (with agricultural production decimated in Barbuda and Dominica), as displacement and disruptions to livelihoods are expected to last for several months. Longer term recovery, development and reconstruction programmes will be needed, including the regeneration of key service industries such as tourism on which many of the affected countries depend.

The impact from these natural disasters will also negatively affect the ability of these countries to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and make progress towards Sustainable Development Goals. The relatively limited loss of life can in part be attributed to effective early warning and robust preparedness measures taken by national and local authorities ahead of Irma and it will be important to provide support for these efforts going forward.

Some countries affected already have high levels of indebtedness and reconstruction will require a major injection of additional financing which will exacerbate debt levels if grant or concessional financing cannot be accessed. Achieving the SDGs will require a rethink of the financing required given the high costs of rebuilding and the need to reallocate resources to

sectors devastated by these natural disasters. Systematic consideration of disaster risks in future investments together with effective and coherent use of risk financing instruments can help move towards risk-informed sustainable development and strengthened resilience. Therefore, the issue of financing to achieve the SDGs is of paramount importance to developing countries particularly LDCs and climate vulnerable small states.

While the number of people killed due to natural disasters has declined over the last forty years, the world has witnessed an increase in the number and intensity of natural disasters and the number of people affected. The estimated cost of the damage has also increased drastically over this period. The total damage of disasters was estimated to be \$1.4 trillion for the period 2005-2014.¹ Early estimates for property damage from Hurricane Harvey and Irma are around \$150-200 billion for the United States.² For the Caribbean region, early estimates suggest more than \$10 billion in economic damages resulting from Hurricane Irma (with the impact of Maria still being assessed).³ Economic, social and ecological consequences of disasters go beyond the damage to property, sectors, such as energy, health and education, often incur major losses from a disaster. Furthermore, rising sea levels and warmer climates are likely to make the impact of hurricanes more intense, jeopardizing gains made in development.

Reducing loss of lives, the number of affected people, economic losses, damage to infrastructure and disruption of services is possible, as it is to build back better through disaster risk management.

The 2030 Agenda calls for the development and implementation of a holistic disaster risk management at all levels. In this regard, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction provides a solid basis for a risk-informed and resilient 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Through approaches such as the New Way of Working, humanitarian and development actors are closely collaborating to reduce need, risk and vulnerability, and increase resilience to the impact of recurrent/seasonal disasters caused by natural hazards.

The Council⁴ is organizing a Special Meeting on 24 October 2017 to bring this issue to the attention of the Council and to enhance coordination in response, recovery, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development efforts in the aftermath of these devastating natural disasters. The Council will review how the United Nations system is being mobilized and determine what further actions are needed to meet the immediate needs in an effective and efficient manner, and to ensure a smooth transition from managing the consequences of disasters to risk-informed sustainable development and strengthened resilience for future disaster events.

Objectives of the special meeting of ECOSOC

This meeting will draw on recent experience of countries along with experts on the topic to:

¹ <https://www.flickr.com/photos/isdr/16111599814/>

² <https://www.reuters.com/article/brief-moodys-analytics-sees-economic-cos/brief-moodys-analytics-sees-economic-cost-of-irma-at-64-92-billion-idUSF9N1L0029>

³ https://www.cedim.de/download/FDA_Irma_2017%20vFinal.pdf

⁴ In line with its mandate, ECOSOC periodically hosts special meetings to address global development emergencies or crises, to raise awareness and to serve as a high level policy platform for coordination of actors working on a specific situation to develop a strategic response. To this end, the Council organized special meeting on the [African food crisis](#) and [Avian Flu](#) in 2005, global food crisis in [2008](#) and [2013](#), and the devastating earthquake in Haiti in 2010, [Typhoon Haiyan](#) in the Philippines in December 2013, [Ebola](#) in December 2014 and the Zika Virus in February 2016. And most recently, the Council focused on the El Nino phenomenon. These meetings brought attention to their impact on sustainable development. They also promoted coordinated action in support of the affected countries.

- Discuss the current situation and the economic, social and environmental impacts of the natural disasters on the affected countries and how these will impact development gains and the countries' capacities to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and achieve the SDGs;
- Share measures and practices by countries to manage and respond to the natural disasters, and draw lessons from the previous ones;
- Examine how the United Nations system, regional and international organizations, civil society organizations, the private sector and the scientific community can work better together at all levels to help countries effectively reduce disaster risk and strengthen resilience, prepare for and respond to future disaster events, with the support of risk financing instruments;
- Discuss the importance and mechanisms for accessing finance on concessional terms for climate vulnerable states, including SIDS;
- Discuss the importance of revisiting the criteria for country classification and the need to include vulnerability to economic shocks and natural disasters as a key consideration.

Expected Outcome

The outcome of the meeting will be a Presidential Statement, highlighting the main conclusions and policy recommendations emanating from the discussions.