



STATEMENT

**DELIVERED BY
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**ON BEHALF OF THE
SECRETARY-GENERAL
CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM)**

**FOR THE
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL COUNCIL (ECOSOC)**

**NEW YORK, USA
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Salutations

Let me at the outset express, on behalf of the Secretary-General, his great regret that he was unable to be here today due to a previously scheduled Summit meeting between CARICOM and Mexico. However, given the importance which he accords to this Special Meeting, he has delegated me to deliver a statement on his behalf.

Last month two back-to-back category 5 hurricanes, one of them the most powerful ever recorded in the Atlantic, swept across the Caribbean in September, cutting a swathe of destruction, taking lives, devastating infrastructure and severely damaging the economies of small climate-vulnerable states.

Not even in the Caribbean, which is the most natural disaster-prone Region in the world, had anything like this been experienced before. Hurricanes Irma and Maria were a game changer. Two category five hurricanes in two weeks and one, Maria, going from a category 1 to a category 5 in less than 36 hours.

Both events were unprecedented. The occurrence of successive category 5 hurricanes signals a dangerous change in the intensity and frequency of these climate change related events, and heralds the advent of a new normal.

Six of our Member States and three of our Associate Members were affected. Thirty-seven people died and a similar amount are missing. The principal economic sectors of tourism and agriculture have been very significantly affected, the resulting loss of livelihoods compounding the anguish of the loss of homes.

Irma devastated Barbuda, (the sister isle of Antigua and Barbuda), the British Virgin Islands of Tortola and Josh Van Dyke, Turks and Caicos Islands, and Anguilla, as well as, St. Marten and St. Barts. It also caused significant damage in The Bahamas and Haiti and affected St. Kitts and Nevis.

Residents of Barbuda had to be evacuated as the island was uninhabitable after Hurricane Irma damaged or destroyed more than 90 percent of the buildings and almost all the infrastructure. Most residents remain in shelters and other accommodation on the main island of Antigua.

Maria left massive destruction in Dominica. The destruction is unparalleled. It accounted for 26 of the total deaths and 34 of the missing. 95% of the Island's buildings are damaged or destroyed; nearly all vegetation blown away, decimating the Island's lush rainforests.

Cuba and the Dominican Republic, were also impacted by the hurricanes.

Full damage assessments in Barbuda and Dominica are still ongoing, but initial estimates indicate recovery costs could be more than US\$1.0 billion.

A relevant example of the depth of the problem our Region faces is the case of Dominica. Decimated by Maria, the country had not yet fully recovered from the ravages of Tropical Storm Erika, which struck in 2015. The total damage and loss then was estimated at nearly US\$500 million, equivalent to 90 percent of Dominica's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), according to a damage and impact assessment conducted by the Government of Dominica in collaboration with the World Bank, United Nations, and other development partners. Before rehabilitation and reconstruction was complete from that first event, a second climatic event has now compounded the problems.

The events of last month emphasize that climate change is not a matter to be debated. For us, climate change is a lived reality. It is an existential threat to our Region.

According to a World Bank report, “Turn down the Heat”, the number of severe hurricanes is projected to increase by 40 percent, if global temperatures rise by 2°C and up to 80 percent should they rise by 4°, the more likely scenario based on current trends. When allied to sea-level rise, this will have devastating effects on all Small Island and Low-Lying Coastal Developing States (SIDS), but particularly those in the Caribbean, this study confirms.

The countries impacted by the hurricanes in our Community are SIDS and, as such, have inherent vulnerabilities. The repercussions of climate-related disasters such as these weigh heavily on their development prospects.

Given the increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters, the resulting high levels of reconstruction will require a major injection of additional financing which will exacerbate debt levels, if grant or concessional financing cannot be accessed.

What is needed is the facility to readily access financing, especially by small and capacity constrained countries. Innovative financing mechanisms must be also found to enable countries to cope with external shocks of such magnitude.

Most of the countries are categorized as middle income, and are ineligible for concessional development financing from Multilateral Financial Institutions (MFIs), and Official Development Assistance (ODA) due to the use of GDP per capita as the primary criterion for access.

There is need for new thinking leading to changes in the criteria for determining access to concessional resources, and to end the use of the dominant criterion of GDP to measure development. As applied to SIDS this must be changed as a matter of urgency to include the concept of vulnerability.

Our experience is that you borrow to rebuild. Another climatic event destroys what you are rebuilding. You have to borrow to build again, even as you have not yet paid off the first set of debt.

That compounds the debt burden of our Region. In a very almost diabolical way, construction adds to your GDP and hence your per capita income increases and our countries are labelled as middle income. Therefore, they cannot access concessional development financing. It is a trap.

There is hope. At the recent Annual Meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in Washington, both institutions signaled their willingness to support a temporary change in the role of GDP as the main criterion in determining access to concessional development financing. The officials, however, stressed that the decision to make that change lay with the board members, particularly the larger shareholders. While we welcome this move to a temporary change in the criteria, we would require a permanent change in the criteria since the effects of climate change will be with us for the foreseeable future.

If Caribbean countries are to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 they need urgent access to financing, including for climate change adaptation. While we accept and agree on the need for accountability, the process to get resources such as the Green Climate Fund, sometimes can be very daunting and time consuming. Time is of the essence in accessing those funds as events such as these hurricanes are occurring more frequently. Reconstruction must therefore be climate resilient in time for the next event.

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. The issue of financing to achieve the SDGs is of paramount importance to developing countries particularly, LDCs and climate vulnerable small states.

The devastation caused by these hurricanes, and in anticipation of more frequent events of a similar nature, speaks to the need to build back better. Rebuilding and reconstruction of our countries' physical infrastructure will need to foster long-term resilience and better resistance to these climatic shocks which are becoming more intense overtime.

We intend to rebuild smarter and more resilient in order to make CARICOM a showcase for recovery and rebuilding resilience.

We can only do so with international support. In that regard, CARICOM with the support of the United Nations Development Programme is convening a High-Level Donor Conference to help the Region access much needed support. The Conference will be held here in New York on 21 November.

In going forward these words of the Concept Note for this session resonate with us. The objective must be *“to ensure a smooth transition from managing the consequences of disasters to risk-informed sustainable development and strengthened resilience for future disaster events”*.

Let us work together to achieve it.