

Opening remarks by Mr. Robert Glasser

Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction

ECOSOC Special Meeting – Impacts of the 2015/16 El Niño phenomenon: Reducing risks and capturing opportunities

May 6, 2016 (10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.)

ECOSOC Chamber

Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege for me to address the opening of this Special Meeting of the ECOSOC on the *“Impacts of the 2015/16 El Niño phenomenon: Reducing risks and capturing opportunities”*.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the President and to the Council for convening this very timely and important meeting, and I sincerely regret that I cannot be with you in person today.

The current El Niño has manifested in extreme weather events which have had an impact on a number of countries across the world and affected an estimated 60 million people so far. Some countries have experienced greater precipitation leading to floods, other have experienced severe droughts affecting crop yields, and livestock production leading to food and water shortages. The accumulative impact of all these events have had a significant socio-economic impact on countries and communities.

While it is too early to assess the full impacts of the current El Niño, we know that certain countries have greater economic exposure to El Niño related events, while the proportional impact on people and their livelihoods is higher in low income countries and Small Island Developing States. Climate change is also likely to increase El Niño risk further, highlighting the need for long term development strategies to factor-in these risks.

The good news is that thanks to more accurate seasonal forecasts, there is an increased predictability of occurrence of El Niño cycles and occurrence of extreme events in general. With this in mind, countries have better opportunities to take action to manage and reduce the related risks and impacts.

How do we reduce the impacts of El Niño?

A key aspect is to translate the seasonal forecasts and risk data into risk-informed decision making and actionable guidance so that different development sectors can take proactive measures. If development sectors get these forecasts early enough, action can be taken to reduce the impact of El Niño. Many countries have taken measures in sectors such as agriculture, fishery, food security, and health. For example:

- The Government of El Salvador has distributed drought- and rust-resistant coffee plants and trained producers on the use of irrigation techniques.
- The Department of Agriculture in the Philippines has prepared a roadmap to address El Niño, which includes the use of cloud seeding, seed distribution, promoting crop diversification and water saving and enhanced monitoring to help farmers cope.
- Government of Malawi is increasing social support services (safety nets), including social cash transfers; income generating public works; inputs for assets programme; and school feeding.
- The Ministry of health in Angola has started revitalizing health services, particularly to combat yellow fever, malaria and other diseases.

The current El Niño event has highlighted the gap in resources required for countries to prepare for and reduce the impact of El Niño. Investments are required in long-term efforts to provide climate services that reduce the risk to El Niño events and increase local and national preparedness capacity and resilience.

Preventing new and reducing existing disaster risk is the core goal of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030) adopted by the international community last year. Together with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Sendai Framework provides a way forward for addressing future El Niño events. The Sendai Framework's seven global targets include substantial reductions of disaster mortality, number of people affected, direct economic losses, as well as damage to infrastructure. It also seeks to increase by 2020 the number of countries with national and local risk reduction strategies (which should take into consideration El Niño risk), bolster the capacity of developing countries and increase availability of and access to multi-hazard early warning systems.

Mr. President, Distinguished delegates,

This meeting provides an important opportunity to identify existing gaps and challenges in addressing El Niño. Through experiences of countries, we can capture opportunities for reducing its socio-economic impacts to development. I wish you a very productive and interactive session.

Thank you.