

2 November 2016

71st session of the General Assembly

Statement by H.E. Peter Thomson, Socio economic and environmental effects of the “El Niño” Phenomenon

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

Since the General Assembly adopted its resolution on the global impacts of the 2015/16 El Niño phenomenon last December, the lives of over 60 million people across our world have been impacted by El Niño’s devastating effects.

Extreme droughts across Southern Africa have caused massive crop failures, leaving millions of people without enough food. Catastrophic hurricanes have moved across the Caribbean, devastating tropical cyclones have battered the Pacific and South-East Asia, and in Ecuador, widespread flooding and landslides have struck communities.

The El Niño phenomenon has severely disrupted global rainfall patterns, leading to both disastrous flooding and prolonged droughts.

The compounding effects of climate change and El Niño have seen the intensity, frequency and variability of extreme weather events increase, hitting those countries least responsible for climate change, first and the hardest. These extreme weather events are predicted to worsen in the future.

The humanitarian impacts of El Niño have been profound, creating massive need across our world – increasing food insecurity and malnutrition; exacerbating outbreaks of infectious, respiratory, and waterborne diseases; disrupting health and education services; up-ending livelihoods; and forcibly displacing people and communities.

Meanwhile, the prospects for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in countries affected by the El Niño phenomenon are being undermined.

Urgent action is required.

Comprehensive, long-term strategies are needed to build early warning systems, to strengthen the resilience of vulnerable countries, and to prevent, mitigate and repair the adverse socioeconomic and environmental impacts.

Humanitarian responses need to be scaled up, with financial, technical, and capacity-building support provided to countries and people in need.

Greater collaboration and information exchange is required, including through the collection, and sharing of timely and accurate data between relevant institutions and networks.

And, very importantly, global awareness and understanding of El Niño and climate change is also essential.

To this end, I commend the Secretary-General for his prescient decision earlier this year to appoint former President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, and Ambassador Macharia Kamau, of Kenya – as his Special Envoys for El Niño and Climate, and to task them to take the message to the world.

The Special Envoys are already having an impact, travelling to El Niño-affected communities in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Papua New Guinea, and Timor-Leste in order to understand and raise awareness of challenges and priorities.

Distinguished delegates,

As has been said, more than 60 million people around our world are affected by severe El Niño-linked weather events.

As a recurring global phenomenon, rather than a one-off event, addressing the impacts of El Niño requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach.

Implementing the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Paris Agreement on climate change, are critical to these efforts.

Let us therefore commit ourselves to implementing urgently, effectively and at scale, these global agreements, and to addressing the socioeconomic and environmental effects of the El Niño Phenomenon.