PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

THE PRESIDENT OF THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

GA-ECOSOC Thematic Event "El Niño 2023-2024: Actions for the safety, sustainability, and resilience of people and the planet"

Tuesday, 30 April 2024, Trusteeship Council Chamber

Background

On April 30, 2024, the President of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Dennis Francis, and the President of the Economic and Social Council, H.E. Ms. Paula Narvaez, co-organized a thematic event titled "El Niño 2023-2024: Actions for the safety, sustainability, and resilience of people and the planet." This event was held in accordance with the General Assembly resolution 78/152 with the support of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the World Meteorological Organization, and other relevant entities of the United Nations system. The dialogue aimed to discuss action-oriented recommendations to address the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of the current El Niño phenomenon on affected countries by fostering collaboration and responses from governments, stakeholders, and international organizations. It highlighted the necessity for increased resources, leadership commitment, and improved coordination to effectively mitigate the impacts of El Niño events. The thematic event called for proactive measures such as capacity building, data sharing, and technology transfer to bolster resilience and adaptation efforts. As mandated, the outcomes of this discussion will be used to provide substantive input to the report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 to be submitted to the General Assembly at its seventy-ninth session.

Opening segment

In his opening statement, the President of the General Assembly (PGA), H.E. Mr. Dennis Francis, highlighted the increasing frequency of extreme weather events related to the El Niño phenomenon. These events included droughts in Central America and floods in the Pacific, Southeast Asia, and Southern Africa. He emphasized the challenges faced by countries highly exposed and vulnerable to disasters, especially due to limited access to sufficient *ex-ante* disaster risk finance. The PGA highlighted the impact of human-induced climate change, noting that 2023 was the warmest year on record because of rising greenhouse gas emissions. He underlined the need to mobilize resources, improve forecasting, and build capacity. The PGA stressed the urgency of prioritizing vulnerable communities, focusing on climate change mitigation, and encouraging action-oriented recommendations. He called for coordinated efforts involving the UN, governments, civil society, academia, and the private sector to address the effects of El Niño and reduce their impact.

In a pre-recorded video statement, the President of the Economic and Social Council (PECOSOC), H.E. Ms. Paula Narvaez, emphasized the catastrophic consequences of El Niño for vulnerable countries, citing reduced crop yields, food shortages, and malnutrition as key impacts with knock-on effects. She called for data-driven approaches across various sectors, including the integration of

forecasts, alongside resilient and risk-sensitive investments aimed at bolstering climate services to address diverse risks such as droughts, floods, and forest fires. She emphasized the necessity of an integrated approach fostering collaboration and facilitation, underscoring the critical role of collective efforts in addressing the impacts of El Niño on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) progress.

The Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Mr. Navid Hanif, spoke on behalf of the Under-Secretary-General for the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs. He emphasized the urgent need to mitigate the impacts of extreme weather to achieve the SDGs. Mr. Hanif highlighted the significance of disaster risk reduction policies in achieving resilience-related SDG targets and stressed the importance of examining the socioeconomic effects of El Niño events, referencing the latest analysis by the Inter-Agency Steering Committee. He also outlined five critical actions to address the effects of El Niño: prevention in early warning systems that leave no one behind; enhanced statistical monitoring to study El Niño's impacts for effective mitigation; promotion of research and development in climate resilience and agricultural technologies; fostering international partnerships to exchange information and solutions; and investing in resilient infrastructure, housing, and flood walls. ASG Hanif reiterated DESA's commitment to supporting Member States in monitoring disaster risk reduction over the next six years.

In a pre-recorded video, Ms. Celeste Saulo, the Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization, advocated for enhancing capabilities to provide continuous seasonal and sub-seasonal prediction services, rather than focusing solely on El Niño. She expressed that these services were essential for supporting national planning processes amidst a changing climate risk landscape that affected food, water, and energy security, as well as health and environmental protection. Ms. Saulo outlined multiple impacts of the 2023-2024 El Niño, including severe droughts in South America, disruption of traffic through the Panama Canal due to low water levels, unprecedented drought and wildfires in the Amazon, and floods in the Horn of Africa exacerbating humanitarian crises. She highlighted that the ability to predict El Niño and La Niña events well in advance, would enable society to prepare, reduce economic losses, and minimize risks to lives and livelihoods. These predictions were a crucial component of the Early Warnings for All initiative, which aimed to expand early warning systems globally. Ms. Saulo stressed the important role that National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) played internationally and within their national governments by providing services to help monitor and predict El Niño and other seasonal patterns to support decision-makers. She called for increased investment to better prepare for future climate risks and improve forecasting capabilities, urging immediate action in preparation for the next event. Ms. Saulo concluded by stating that WMO and NMHSs were supporting the humanitarian community to act ahead of disasters by providing prediction services that trigger anticipatory humanitarian action and pre-arranged humanitarian financing through the WMO's Coordination Mechanisms for Humanitarian Support and the UN's ENSO Cell.

Concluding the opening segment, Acting Special Representative of the Secretary-General (ASRSG)

for Disaster Risk Reduction, Ms. Paola Albrito, emphasized the need for enhanced foresight, impact-based forecasting, and investment in skills and capacity building. These measures were essential to empower nations in reducing the adverse impacts of El Niño and cultivating a culture of prevention and preparedness. Ms. Albrito highlighted that the burden of resultant disasters fell disproportionately on low-income communities and Small Island Developing States, underscoring the need for proactive measures to mitigate such disparities. She advocated for expanded coverage and investment in multi-hazard early warning systems, emphasizing that predictable, recurrent, and slow-onset events like El Niño need not culminate in disasters. Ms. Albrito also asserted that these systems had the potential to significantly reduce economic losses by 30% and mortality rates six-fold. Additionally, she stressed the necessity of augmenting funding for risk reduction and adaptation efforts on a broad scale. Furthermore, Ms. Albrito underscored the importance of fostering partnerships between governments, UN entities, and the private sector to orchestrate a comprehensive approach to addressing the multifaceted dimensions of the El Niño phenomenon.

Plenary segment

During the interactive discussion, climate change emerged as a significant worsening factor, by intensifying disasters, and exacerbating vulnerabilities within at-risk communities. Member States underscored the severity of El Niño's present and future impacts, particularly on vulnerable populations. Representatives outlined the widespread outcomes, ranging from droughts in Latin America and Southern Africa to flooding in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands. Delegations echoed the need to strengthen early warning systems and support the formulation of disaster risk reduction strategies across all levels of governance. Member States stressed the importance of capacity building, data sharing, technological transfer, and investments in enhancing meteorological services, regional forecasting capabilities, and innovative climate resilience initiatives. Emphasis was placed on leveraging advanced satellite data and region-specific forecasting to aid farmers and communities, underscoring the pivotal role of technology and youth engagement.

The discussion recurrently centered on the pressing need for funding and technical assistance. Delegates highlighted the stark disparity between available disaster risk financing and the level of requirement, advocating for greater international cooperation to bridge funding gaps. Calls were made for innovative financial instruments, debt relief, and technical support, particularly for developing nations. Commitments toward pre-approved financing to bolster vulnerable countries through multilateral and bilateral efforts, including humanitarian assistance for anticipatory action, were emphasized. Recommendations from delegations included strengthening early warning systems through investments in inclusive multi-hazard frameworks; ensuring inclusion of vulnerable communities; building climate resilience via comprehensive strategies encompassing agricultural adaptation, infrastructure development, and livelihood protection; fostering international cooperation, with initiatives such as the Lima Declaration and South American regional working groups serving as models for enhancing intergovernmental collaboration; ensuring data accessibility and tailoring information to demographic needs to empower and include local communities in decision-making

processes; prioritizing inclusivity to facilitate the involvement of women and youth in disaster risk reduction efforts and advancing gender-responsive approaches; establishing partnerships with humanitarian organizations to enhance response capabilities; transitioning to sustainable energy systems; and investing in scientific research to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

a) **Multistakeholder Panel 1 – "Actions taken to reduce 2023/2024 El Niño Risks"**

The segment was moderated by Ms. Bernadette Placky-Woods, Climate Central VP, Chief Meteorologist, and Climate Matters Director, and comprised a panel discussion followed by an interactive exchange with Member States and Observers. The panelists were Ms. Yolanda González, Director, International Center for El Niño Phenomenon Research, Ecuador (CIIFEN); Mr. Edson Nkonde, Director, Meteorological Department of the Republic of Zambia; Ms. Reena Ghelani, Assistant Secretary-General, Climate Crisis Coordinator for the El Niño response; and Ms. Dyanne Marenco, President of the Costa Rican Red Cross.

During her presentation, Ms. Yolanda González, Director, International Center for El Niño Phenomenon Research, Ecuador, detailed the various impacts of the El Niño phenomenon on development across different sectors. She emphasized the importance of understanding its different phases and focusing on key sectors such as agriculture, water resources, biodiversity, tourism, energy, and communications, both in the public and private sectors. Ms. González stressed the need for early warning systems and informed actions to mitigate the threats posed by El Niño effectively. She highlighted the significance of collaborative efforts between sectors to ensure proactive responses to the phenomenon. Ms. González advocated for a scientific perspective promoting harmonious relations between humanity and nature, including educational initiatives for children to better understand climate variability. Additionally, she urged Member States to enhance their understanding of meteorological research and promote cross-sector collaboration. She concluded by emphasizing the importance of continuous learning, reinforced early warning systems, and scientifically informed strategies to effectively respond to future El Niño events.

Mr. Edson Nkonde, Director, Meteorological Department of the Republic of Zambia, explained the significant impact of El Niño on various sectors in in his country, especially its negative effects on agriculture, water resources, and hydro-based energy production. He emphasized the urgent need to improve the distribution of information and promote collaboration across communities and sectors to reduce losses from extreme events. Mr. Nkonde stressed the importance of creating localized information that met specific needs of vulnerable communities. Additionally, he highlighted the necessity of strengthening early warning systems to ensure that timely and relevant information was available to communities through various channels such as local radio stations, SMS, social media platforms, and print media. Mr. Nkonde advocated for the involvement of agricultural extension workers in disseminating meteorological information to farmers and underscored the vital role of continuous community feedback and the integration of scientific and local knowledge to empower communities in utilizing information effectively. He concluded by emphasizing the critical

importance of consistently providing reliable climate predictions to enhance community confidence and facilitate robust planning and response mechanisms.

Ms. Reena Ghelani, Assistant Secretary-General, Climate Crisis Coordinator for the El Niño response, described the significant challenges faced by the most vulnerable to the impacts of El Niño. She emphasized the crucial need to gather information from local communities, governments, and responders to effectively address the increasing humanitarian needs and prevent avoidable disasters. Ms. Ghelani stressed the importance of being prepared, providing early warnings, and taking prompt action, highlighting the seriousness of growing vulnerabilities in all sectors. She also pointed out the insufficient allocation of development funding for proactive disaster risk reduction efforts and called for increased investments in climate resilience and poverty alleviation initiatives. Ms. Ghelani called for stronger support from Member States and the UN system to help the nations most severely affected by climate change and highlighted the need to address funding gaps and debt burdens. Additionally, she stressed the importance of enhancing international and regional cooperation, particularly in empowering frontline responders and promoting gender equality in disaster recovery and poverty alleviation efforts. Finally, Ms. Ghelani reiterated the necessity of collective responsibility in establishing stronger support systems for the most vulnerable.

Ms. Dyanne Marenco, President of the Costa Rican Red Cross discussed the various impacts of El Niño, particularly focusing on drought-related emergencies in affected countries. She highlighted the adverse effects on hydroelectric energy, increased wildfires, loss of animal life, and heightened rates of infectious diseases. Ms. Marenco emphasized the need for proactive measures and mentioned the ‘Center for Community Resilience and Environment’ in Costa Rica as a model for conducting risk assessments and providing tools for anticipatory action to mitigate impacts and facilitate effective recovery. She called for coordinated anticipatory action in collaboration with the State and stressed the importance of strengthening early warning systems and anticipatory measures at all levels, while ensuring the self-sufficiency of indigenous populations. Moreover, she highlighted the need for close cooperation with local communities and inclusivity in response efforts to reduce El Niño's impact and build resilience against future disasters.

During the interactive discussion with Member States, Observers, UN system and stakeholders, the importance of ensuring fiscal strength to address shocks was underlined, urging the removal of regional and multilateral trade barriers for assuring resilient supply chains. Importance of appropriate messaging was highlighted. Case was also made by a Member State for scaling up regional coordination to identify risk and improve capacity for response. The panellists agreed on the need to further enhance financing and strengthen international cooperation to multiply impact.

b) Multistakeholder Panel 2 – "Long-term strategies to create the enabling institutional and policy environment required to take effective action"

The segment was moderated by Dr Andrew Kruczkiewicz, Senior Staff Associate at the International Research Institute for Climate and Society, Columbia University, and comprised a panel discussion followed by an interactive exchange with Member States, Observers and stakeholders. The panelists were Ms. Beth Bechdol, Deputy Director-General, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO); Ms. Irma Dewy Rismayati from National Disaster Management Agency, Republic of Indonesia; Mr. Mikko Ollikainen, Head of Adaptation Fund; Mr. Santiago Caramés, National Director of the Emergency System, Uruguay; and Ms. Aminata Monekata, Programme Manager and Country Representative, ActionAid International in Mali. Ms. Elizabeth Taylor Jay, Vice Minister of Multilateral Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia was the respondent.

In her presentation, Ms. Bechdol outlined the joint efforts of the United Nations system, focusing on the work of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to support governments dealing with the impacts of El Niño. She elaborated on FAO's collaborative projects with government bodies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to provide proactive measures and training in crucial areas such as post-harvest storage, irrigation, and seed provision. Ms. Bechdol emphasized the importance of climate-smart agricultural practices in building resilience against challenges and stressed the need to shift focus from immediate responses to long-term solutions, fostering connections between humanitarian, developmental, and peace efforts. Furthermore, she highlighted that international cooperation is fundamental in improving data quality for informed decision-making and efficient implementation. Ms. Bechdol advocated for establishing early warning systems that could translate predictions into actionable measures and emphasized the urgency of securing sufficient and flexible funding to achieve resilience goals. She also stressed the importance of bridging the gap between information and action and ensuring the effective implementation of early warning systems and climate-resilient practices.

Ms. Dewi shared valuable insights into strategies for enhancing disaster resilience and climate adaptation in Indonesia, with a focus on addressing the impacts of El Niño. She emphasized the importance of community engagement, long-term policies, and infrastructure development to build resilience and mitigate the impacts of disasters. Speaking about Indonesia's vulnerability to disasters, which is exacerbated by the effects of El Niño, Ms. Dewi outlined strategies to tackle these challenges. She highlighted the significance of improving community-based awareness programs and coordinating emergency operations among multiple stakeholders. Ms. Dewi underscored the importance of long-term policies and actions, including climate change adaptation strategies, for sustainable development and resilience-building efforts. She stressed the need for disaster resilience and climate change plans to be integrated into development plans at all levels of government, with a strong emphasis on prioritizing climate-resilient infrastructure development. Furthermore, she highlighted the importance of strengthening early warning systems and data collection, utilizing technology and community-based approaches to enhance adaptation strategies. Ms. Dewi also spotlighted the need to involve communities in decision-making processes related to disaster

management policies and to integrate regulatory frameworks across government levels and sectors. These actions would strengthen disaster resilience and climate adaptation efforts, providing a comprehensive and inclusive approach to mitigating the impacts of El Niño.

Mr. Ollikainen shared valuable insights on strategies to enhance funding and capacity-development for climate adaptation. He emphasized the importance of collaboration, financial planning, and data-driven decision-making. Mr. Ollikainen stressed the urgent need to increase investments in resilience-building measures and prioritize anticipatory action to effectively address the challenges of climate change. He also highlighted the significance of collaborating with regional and national partners. Additionally, he outlined the need to scale up public resources to bridge the funding gap. Mr. Ollikainen explained that data on the effectiveness of adaptation efforts is essential for making informed decisions, and funding strategies should be adaptable to evolving needs. Outlining the crucial components of financial planning and capacity development to access finance, he underscored the imperative of cooperation to efficiently meet growing challenges. Furthermore, he mentioned the success of initiatives such as the Adaptation Fund Readiness Program for Climate Finance, which facilitated learning among national agencies in countries like Indonesia. Mr. Ollikainen also pointed out that failing to take proactive steps in adaptation could result in significantly higher costs, stressing the urgency to increase investments in resilience-building measures, prioritize anticipatory action, and close the funding gap.

Mr. Caramés emphasized the need for a cultural change in risk management, with a focus on prioritizing people in strategies. He suggested using public opinion surveys to inform integrated risk management governance and advocated for a cultural shift that takes into account public perceptions. He highlighted the importance of keeping people at the forefront for shaping policies and understanding community needs. He emphasized the significance of strong political determination and community engagement in the governance of integrated risk management to ensure that policies reflected a commitment to the well-being of citizens. Mr. Caramés also emphasized the importance of sharing information and promoting widespread knowledge, considering local conditions, as vital elements of effective risk management planning. He called for integrated approaches that involved communities directly and prioritized political will for inclusive strategies.

Ms. Monekata emphasized the importance of collaboration among stakeholders and local action in resilience-building efforts. She spotlighted the pivotal role of civil society organizations, international and national NGOs, and local-level partners in ensuring effective stakeholder engagement and participation; and in addressing financing challenges. Ms. Monekata also emphasized the significance of stakeholder innovation and collaborative efforts in strengthening local input and action for resilience-building initiatives. She provided an example of utilizing text warnings and disseminating government information to underscore the importance of localization in policy implementation. She advocated for the participation, engagement, and involvement of women and youth, as well as the need to consider gender aspects in resilience-building efforts.

The Vice Minister of Multilateral Affairs of Colombia, Ms. Elizabeth Taylor Jay was the designated respondent for this panel. In her intervention, she cited instances of increased forest fires, water shortages, depleted dam levels, and flooding and explained some of the measures undertaken to counteract this phenomenon including the implementation of national plans and awareness campaigns aimed at mitigating the effects of El Niño in Colombia. Ms. Jay advocated for the incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and practices in the formulation of public policies. Additionally, she underscored the necessity for national development plans to prioritize capacity-building initiatives and stressed the significance of international cooperation. She emphasized that responses must be tailored to address the diverse vulnerabilities experienced by individual countries. She also emphasized the need for financial assistance and technological exchange and transfers to strengthen resilience efforts.

Closing segment

The joint thematic event concluded with brief statements by the Vice President of the Economic and Social Council and Vice President of the General Assembly. On behalf of the President of the Economic and Social Council, H.E. Mr. Akan Rakhmetullin, Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to the United Nations stressed the necessity of an integrated approach in addressing the multifaceted impacts of El Niño. He urged maintaining and enhancing cross-border collaboration and knowledge-sharing to shape global responses and resilient strategies in the face of escalating climate-related disasters. He highlighted the critical role of science, technology, and data in guiding preparedness and response efforts. This necessitated strong political commitment and substantial investments in climate services and forecasting technologies. He also called for sector-specific preparedness plans, strategic investment mechanisms and policy frameworks for disaster risk reduction and resilience building. He advocated integrating El Niño risk management into national development planning with a focus on inclusivity and prioritizing the needs of the most vulnerable. On behalf of the President of the General Assembly, H.E. Mr. Chola Milambo, Permanent Representative of Zambia to the United Nations, called for the development of comprehensive policies to improve resilience and minimize the effects of El Niño. The international community was urged to continue collaborating and translating knowledge into action to build a resilient and sustainable world.

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