

## **Climate Justice needed now for SIDS to meet the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development**

Good morning,

It is a pleasure for me to offer a few remarks on the current realities of climate change for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) of the Caribbean, home to millions of people of African descent. It is also opportune that we speak of these issues here on the heels of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) where world leaders met to show solidarity and take concerted action against the threat of climate change.

Though widespread, the climate threat was not commonly created and is not commonly felt. For the SIDS of the Caribbean, the climate threat is a harsh reality of climate disasters that limits their socioeconomic growth and makes illusive the realisation of the sustainable development goals (SDGS) by 2030.

Prime Minister Mia Mottley of Barbados in her statement at COP27 highlighted these challenges and the injustice caused by climate change. She reminded us that ‘the prosperity — and high carbon emissions — of the rich world has been achieved at the expense of the poor in times past, and now the poor are being forced to pay again, as victims of climate breakdown that they did not cause. That, she said, is fundamentally unfair.’<sup>1</sup>

Similar remarks were made by other SIDS leaders reiterating the urgent need for justice for their countries facing rising sea levels, severe hurricanes and other extreme weather conditions. They concurred that these disasters have often led to the deviation of expenditure away from planned development initiatives toward rebuilding efforts. It has also led to mounting debt repayments from high interest loans associated with the big financial institutions, including the World Bank, for disaster reconstruction. With each new disaster financial vulnerability grows in Caribbean countries and the capacity to respond weakens.

Climate justice must also mean that just measures are taken to ensure these countries are not left behind in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; an agenda that urges countries to take urgent action to combat climate change and to correct the historical wrongs evident in the climate crisis. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, in a March 2022 address to the UN General Assembly marking the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, reinforced the sentiment that ‘historical injustices manifest themselves in poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization, and social instability for entire communities and countries...It is time to recognize and repair longstanding wrongs’.<sup>2</sup>

Target 13.5 of the 2030 Agenda specifically calls for the implementation of ‘the commitment undertaken by developed-country parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to a goal of mobilizing jointly \$100 billion annually by 2020 to address the needs of developing countries.’ Despite this call, developed countries have failed to demonstrate political will and to live up to their

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<sup>1</sup> Greenfield et al. “Barbados Prime Minister Launches Blistering Attack on Rich Nations at COP27 Climate Talks.” The Guardian, 7 November 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/nov/07/barbados-pm-mia-mottley-launches-blistering-attack-on-rich-nations-at-cop27-climate-talks>. Accessed on 13 November 2022.

<sup>2</sup> UN News. “For equality, respect and dignity we must ‘speak as one’ against racism: Guterres.” UN, 18 March 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1114252>. Accessed on 13 November 2022.

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promises to help finance the climate breakdown. They have yet to reach the annual \$100 billion promised under the Paris Agreement and to cut emissions to effectively mitigate the impact of climate change.

While People of African Descent are not mentioned in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the challenges that they face in terms of institutional and systemic racism and inequalities requires States to consider them as individuals and communities that are actually left behind in defiance of one of the core principles of the agenda.

SDG 10 speaks to reducing inequalities within and between States. People of African descent experience both types of inequality acutely as a result of the climate crisis. The international community has focused on addressing inequalities within States in efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Agenda. However, addressing inequalities between States must also be prioritised toward achieving climate justice. In keeping with sentiments expressed by Prime Minister Mottley and other global leaders, addressing inequalities between States would ensure that those States that became wealthy through unrestricted carbon emissions and repressive discriminatory socioeconomic systems should have the greatest responsibility, not only to stop warming the earth, but to fund and lead the way in mitigating its impact.

Let me walk you through what climate injustice looks like for the Caribbean – the extent to which it has destroyed lives, livelihoods, infrastructure, essential services as well as natural and cultural heritage and obstructed development efforts.

Caribbean News reported that between 1979 and 2019, the five most deadly storms to be felt in the Caribbean region took a total of 11,152 lives and caused between \$594.1 million and \$125 billion in damages. Among the most severe was Hurricane Maria which in 2019 hit Puerto Rico and the Lesser Antilles (Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, The Bahamas, and Turks and Caicos Islands). The most severe impacts were felt on the island of Dominica. Windspeeds of up to 175 mph (280 km/h) were felt in the affected areas, leaving \$96.1 billion in damages in its wake. Hurricane Maria left the affected areas without electricity, clean food and water for months.

Two years later, on 1 September 2019, Dorian hit The Bahamas as a Category 5 hurricane. It was the strongest hurricane to have ever hit that country causing flooding and mass destruction on the northwest islands of Abaco and Grand Bahama. The storm pounded the islands for 48 long hours resulting in the tragic loss of human lives: children, the elder, entire families were lost. One woman sobbed while recalling being wedged between two trees and watching her husband and three small children being swept out to sea. To date, the official overall death toll is 74 with 282 people still unaccounted for.

An additional 29,472 persons were affected by the hurricane by damages to their homes and assets. Public buildings, essential infrastructure and entire ecosystems were destroyed by the strong winds and massive storm surges. The Government estimated USD3.4 billion in damages and loss caused by Dorian. Damage in this case refers to the destruction of physical assets (such as buildings) and loss which is a monetary estimation of the goods that would go unproduced (agriculture and manufacturing) and services that go undelivered (tourism).

Loss and damage were evident in almost every sector of the Bahamian islands impacted by Dorian:

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- Social sector: health, housing, education, employment
- Infrastructure sector: power lines, telecommunications, water and sanitation, transport (airports, roads, and access ways)
- Production/ economic sector: main industries of tourism, banking commerce, agriculture, and fisheries
- Environmental sector: destruction of barrier reefs, trees/plants, animals,
- Public health and safety sector

Pretty much every sector across the affected islands suffered loss and damage. This was a similar experience for other countries in the region facing climate disasters in recent years. Hence the strong call by SIDS for repayments for loss and damage suffered as a result of climate change that occurred despite adaptation and mitigation. This means that the more mitigation and adaptation efforts fail, the more support and financing is needed to address loss and damage.

The issue of loss and damage was a point of focus during COP27 with countries reaching a historic decision to establish and operationalise a loss and damage fund, particularly for countries and communities most vulnerable to the climate crisis. The Forum may wish to closely monitor and assess this outcome to encourage clarity in terms of who will pay, who will receive and on which grounds as well as the timeline and process for payment. This should be reviewed, followed up and reported on at the next session of the Permanent Forum.

The InterAmerican Development Bank report entitled ‘Assessment of the Effects and Impacts of Hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas’ noted that the estimated loss would require a new development approach to achieve climate and disaster resilience in areas that range from location of settlements to redesigning infrastructure and strengthening environmental protection. The Forum may wish to examine what a new development approach would look like or entail for States, particularly SIDS, in their quest for sustainable development which is undoubtably linked to climate and disaster resilience.

Recognising the current and historical similarities that have led to calls for reparatory justice and for climate justice it is imperative that the linkages between the two initiatives be explored and strengthened particularly in terms of their development potential for communities of African descent, including those living in the SIDS of the Caribbean. We recognize that pursuing the resource-intensive development pathways of today’s rich countries would pose existential threats for all of us. However, SIDS countries have an equal right to development. They should also have a right to access reasonable financing arrangement for reconstruction and development as well as to debt forgiveness due to past and current climate injustices and inequalities.

I would add that a new development approach must also be a human rights approach. It must place people at the centre recognising the psychosocial as well as the economic impact that climate disasters have had on their lives. For example, more focus is needed to document, better understand, and effectively respond to the trauma faced by individuals and communities and the related impact on recovery and productivity following such climate disasters.

Climate change is real. Climate disaster is frightening. Climate breakdown threatens the very existence of SIDS. Climate justice must be **prioritised** not only to reparatory justice but equally to the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development at the heart of which are all **people** mentioned therein or not, so

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that includes people of African descent; **prosperity** for all people, peoples and countries; the **planet** which we all must share; **partnerships** as this cannot involve only Governments, civil society must be equally at the table and their concerns on the agenda; and finally peace – for none of us can truly be content knowing that another disaster is just on the horizon threatening to be more devastating than the last. For there can be no peace without justice.

Madame Chair, they say that a picture paints a thousand words...I leave these final words on hurricane Dorian with you, and I thank you for listening.