

**Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ms. Ursula Mueller, Remarks to the CARICOM-UN High Level Pledging Conference: "Building a more climate-resilient international community"**

*New York, 21 November 2017*

*As delivered*

Madam Chair, Secretary-General, Honorable Prime Ministers, Ladies and gentlemen,

The impact of disasters has already been profound in countries with high-levels of exposure and vulnerability to climate change and this has especially been the case in Small Island [Development] States.

I am the Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator of the United Nations and our mandate is to respond to humanitarian disasters and to coordinate the humanitarian response when a disaster hits; as well as to save lives. I hope that the hurricane winds turn into a wind of change— as was said by the distinguished Prime Minister— a wind of change to bring about resilience, building back better and stronger preparation.

We already witnessed the impact of increased and more intensive hurricanes this September when the major fallout from three major hurricanes - Irma, Jose and Maria - struck the Caribbean region in quick succession and some 2.6 million people were affected.

While the scale of the physical devastation wrought by super-strength Irma was huge, relatively few deaths (35) were reported. In this case it is clear that early warning and early action saved lives.

Effective local and national preparedness mechanisms underscored why these are the first lines of defense to extreme weather events.

In Cuba, robust preparedness measures enabled 1.9 million people, or 17 per cent of the population, to evacuate to shelters and to host families. At-risk communities in the Dominican Republic were reached with critical early warning information via radio, text messages via mobile phones, and public announcements.

Haiti demonstrated that lessons were learned from the 2016 Hurricane Matthew response. Ahead of the September hurricanes, vulnerable communities were evacuated. It has also been mentioned that Barbuda's entire population evacuated to Antigua.

Across the Caribbean, regional and international disaster response mechanisms were invaluable before, during and after the hurricanes.

The Caribbean Disaster Emergency and Management Agency (CDEMA) coordinated early action and response. The United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination, and surge teams, that were pre-positioned in the region, boosted civil-military coordination and information management efforts.

And through these efforts, emergency shelter, clean water and hygiene needs were identified.

Humanitarian partners launched a Regional Response Plan of US\$27.1 million for 265,000 people. In hard-hit Cuba, a Plan of Action sought \$55.8 million for some 2.1 million people. The Hurricane Maria Flash Appeal - for \$31 million - was also announced in Dominica, to help 65,000 people.

Early on the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund—the Secretary-General's fund to respond to humanitarian crises—allocated \$13 million to jumpstart relief efforts in Cuba and Dominica and the region.

So, early action and humanitarian response is critical to save lives but this must be complemented by longer-term efforts to reduce risk and vulnerability, in line with the New Way of Working. Countries must seek to implement the Sustainable Development Goals committed to “reach the furthest behind first” with assistance that will reduce their needs, vulnerabilities and risks, and build their resilience to future shocks and stresses.

At the international level, we must link up our climate-change adaptation, development and humanitarian approaches to reduce needs, risk and vulnerability.

This includes repurposing development activities when early warning signs are received. We have seen firsthand that development activities often do not prioritize the most vulnerable locations of people even after early warning systems have outlined at-risk areas.

In the face of sudden-onset disasters that cut off key services, increased investments must be made to reduce disaster risks, including by building or retrofitting hospitals, schools, and houses to make them resistant to hazards, constructing climate resilient-water and sanitation systems, and retrofitting critical transport and telecommunications infrastructure.

This approach also requires that we take a closer look at the underlying causes of vulnerability and strengthen our efforts to address them. Intervention includes awareness-raising, and social safety nets such as cash transfers and micro-insurance schemes that target the specific needs of girls and boys, and women and men.

As a pathway to economic recovery, the capacity of the agriculture, fisheries and tourism sectors to withstand future shocks should be strengthened.

And I will illustrate this New Way of Working in Dominica. There, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – and you heard the Administrator speak earlier - and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs have set up a Crisis Management Unit which, supports both coordinated emergency assistance and the scale-up of recovery efforts, alongside it.

Going forward, the international community must sustain its support to affected countries and regions, to hasten the pace of recovery, and strengthen resilience. But our efforts must always respect and align with the national priorities of affected States.

Global instruments and frameworks such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Paris Climate Agreement, and of course, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, provide a solid basis for action.

Building on these instruments, the ‘Blueprint for Action’ produced by the Secretary General’s Special Envoys for El Niño and Climate is also an excellent tool for states at risk of El Niño episodes to build climate resilience, act on early warning information and prevent such episodes from becoming disasters.

But tangible results and progress will only be possible through greater investment in early action, climate change adaptation, and disaster risk reduction - supported by adequate, flexible and predictable financing.

Thank you very much.