

Mr Chairman

My government thanks the Government and people of Fiji for presiding over COP23.

This is the first time that a Small Island Developing State has presided over this important conference.

Mr President,

Climate Change is real. It respects no border, no country, large or small, rich or poor.

We in the Caribbean, have had to endure the devastation of more frequent and ferocious hurricanes as a result of global warming. We are enduring persistent droughts, floods, ocean acidification and other climate disasters.

Mr Chairman, we cannot, deny the effects of what we see, feel and hear.

Climate change is not a hoax; it is real and it comes with deadly consequences.

No responsible leader, could reasonably deny the reality of climate change; and no great nation should shirk its climate responsibility.

Each nation should, as a matter of priority, honour its pre-2020 commitments, and those enshrined in the Paris Climate Accord.

It has been two and a half months since my government was compelled to evacuate all the residents from Barbuda in the wake of the monster, Hurricane Irma.

The residents of Barbuda have not been able to return except for a handful of adults, who are living under extremely primitive conditions.

There is no potable water, no electricity, no hospital, no school and no roof on many of the homes left partially standing.

While emergency relief has been provided by some governments and charitable organizations directly to the Red Cross and international agencies, my government has been carrying the burden of caring for the residents of Barbuda; who are living as internally displaced persons, on the main island of Antigua.

In addition, we have had to accommodate approximately 3,000 Dominican nationals, who can be classified as climate refugees.

Simultaneously, my government has been paying the major share of the costs of cleaning-up Barbuda, re-establishing public utilities and rebuilding public infrastructure and institutions.

Our small economy can ill afford it.

But, the residents of Barbuda are my country's citizens.

Regardless of what assistance my government gets - or does not get - from the international community, we have a duty to care for them and to rebuild Barbuda.

And, we will do so, how ever long it takes.

But, the decimation of Barbuda was not caused by any fault of the Barbudan residents, or by my government.

We are the victims of the profligacy of large and wealthy countries that have generated changes in climate, producing more frequent and ferocious hurricanes.

The liability is theirs not ours.

Yet, we are paying the price.

And that is not only injurious, it is also unfair and unjust.

Therefore, capitalizing the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility, securing the future of the Adaptation Fund, and reducing harmful greenhouse gases into the earth's atmosphere are vital; failing which, the world will witness the termination of centuries

old civilizations in the Caribbean, Pacific islands and other coastal communities globally.

Instead of spending trillions on useless wars and regime change, wealthy nations should reduce their carbon foot print and spend the money on global adaptation and mitigation, in protection of our planet earth.

My government thanks the people and government of Germany for its pledge to provide the Adaptation Fund with an additional 50 million euros.

Germany is forging a progressive and responsible path that all should follow.

We invite similar generosity to the donor conference being held at the United Nations in New York on Tuesday the 21st of November for the reconstruction and rebuilding of the Caribbean after the devastation caused by Hurricanes Irma and Maria.

It is time, that all the world's worst historical polluters acknowledge the damage and harm they have done to others, and take responsibility for delivering loss and damage compensation.

In any system of justice and fairness, compensation is paid to the injured by those who cause injury.

Right now, funding to restore livelihoods, and rebuild more climate resilient societies is urgent.

The old ways and systems will not do.

They were not developed to provide for the deadly damage and resultant crises of climate change.

Urgency in assessment, rapid disbursement and complete removal of ridiculous disqualifying criteria, such as per capita income, must be central to the rules dealing with this overwhelming threat and its attendant crises.

The planet Earth belongs to all humankind, not to a few; its bounty is the common heritage of all nations, not only the rich; the burdens of its destruction should not be dumped on the small and vulnerable; the obligations of its care must fall to all, rich, poor, large and small.

Let us all conjoin and work collectively as good stewards of planet earth, to adapt and mitigate the harmful effects of climate change.

Thank you.