

COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA



PERMANENT MISSION OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS
800 Second Avenue, Suite 400E • New York, N.Y. 10017 • Tel: 212 949 0853 • Fax: 212 661-0979

STATEMENT BY

HONOURABLE FRANCINE BARON

**MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS
AND CARICOM AFFAIRS
OF THE
COMMONWEALTH OF DOMINICA**

**AT THE GENERAL DEBATE OF THE
SEVENTY FIRST SESSION OF THE
UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

New York, September 24th, 2016

Please check against delivery

President of the General Assembly – Mr. Peter Thompson
Mr. Secretary General,
Heads and Members of Delegations,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Last year, when this august body met, we resolved collectively to take global action to transform our world in a manner that will bring about sustainable and equitable development.

The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has set the stage for increasing international discourse and action in our fight against inequality; to combat climate change; to empower our citizens; to protect the vulnerable and to improve the lives of billions of people across the globe. Today, Dominica, like other Small Island Developing States (SIDS), remains motivated and committed to achieving the SDGs.

Mr. President, for my country, the realization of the SDGs is not simply about ticking boxes. Fundamentally, it is about making a real and meaningful difference in the lives of our citizens. However, in order for those essential changes to take place, we must each do more at the national level and all countries must deliver on their commitments according to their respective means. This effort will require more structured and effective partnerships.

Additionally, Mr. President, as we focus our minds on the SDGs; we must also sharpen our focus on the impact that climate change continues to have on the development of SIDS. In the last few years, we have witnessed dramatic reduction in agricultural production. We are also experiencing more severe and prolonged droughts, often times followed by sudden and high volumes of rainfall which result in massive soil erosion and catastrophic loss and damage.

Likewise, the ongoing phenomenon of beach erosion, destruction of coral reefs – so vital to our tourism product and the character of our islands - risk untold damage, to our prized tourism assets. Consequently, the economic impact on SIDS are dire. More urgent and wide-ranging action is needed in the fight against climate change to ensure our very survival. To this end, we look forward to building on the momentum of the Paris Agreement as the UNFCCC moves to COP22 in Marakhesh, later this year.

Mr. President; Distinguished delegates, as many of you will recall, a little over a year ago, the Commonwealth of Dominica was painfully reminded of the devastating impact of climate change. In less than 24 hours, Tropical Storm Erika took the lives of 30 Dominicans and wreaked havoc on our country's physical and social infrastructure.

This single climactic event caused damages estimated at EC\$1.3 billion or US\$483 million which accounted for 90% of the island's gross domestic product (GDP).

One year on, we are making great strides and are on track to “build-back-better” and to build more climate resilient and adaptive infrastructure. Whilst we congratulate the Dominicans— at home and abroad - for their support and dedication; our progress has been made easier through partnership and support from our bilateral and multilateral partners.

We therefore take this opportunity to thank them publicly for their invaluable contribution to our rebuilding efforts.

Mr. President, I can tell you, that Dominica’s experience with Tropical Storm Erika is all too common in the lives of SIDS. We continue to suffer the disproportionate burdens and impacts of climate change; which also severely undermines our efforts at sustainable development. Also troubling, are the slow onset events and extreme weather events, brought on as a result of climate change. These are expected to become more frequent and more destructive.

What this means for us, in real terms, is that limited resources that should be targeted at transformative and sustainable development – of necessity – have to be continuously shifted to post-disaster rehabilitation.

Mr. President, this is why Dominica continues its call for collaboration in establishing an International Natural Disaster Risk Fund, to provide timely financial support to SIDS affected by natural disasters. The current Catastrophic Risk Fund within the Caribbean Development Bank for Caribbean SIDS and the IMF and World Bank Disaster Recovery Facilities are good starting points.

Regrettably, in the face of the enormous challenge, their funding levels remain vastly insufficient. We would be quite encouraged should the capitalization of this special Natural Disaster Risk Fund come from the ANNEX 1 members and other major emitters, including voluntary contributors.

We believe that such a facility would allow SIDS to access and secure funds in a more predictable and timely manner and to be able to [re]build more robust infrastructure through effective technical assistance and physical development planning. It would also help these climate-vulnerable countries to build more climate resilient economies and be able to identify vulnerable areas which need to be adapted and mitigated to better deal with any catastrophic future events.

Mr. President, the Government of Dominica is also taking effective steps, at the national level, to improve our ability to respond and to deliver in post-disaster situations. This year, Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit outlined a proposal to establish a national Vulnerability Risk and Resilience Fund. This Fund aims to ensure that Government has immediate access to financial resources in the event of a natural disaster. Funds would also be used to finance climate-resilient projects and programmes.

The capitalization of the Fund will come from government revenue and returns from government's investments in renewable energy projects that have already been implemented with grants and concessionary financing through the Green Climate Fund (GCF).

Two projects have already been identified; (a) the geothermal energy project and, (b) a national waste-to-energy project.

Mr. President, today's interconnectedness of global markets, make access to the global financial system a pre-requisite to economic development and a sine qua non for sustainable development. The free movement of goods and services depends on the ability of the public and private sectors to move financial resources throughout the world.

Therefore, recent actions taken by several international banks in the United States and across Europe to terminate correspondent banking relationships with indigenous banks in the Caribbean, has made it difficult for the Caribbean to do business with the rest of the world. The consequences are far-reaching.

It has affected the transmission of remittances, undermined foreign investments, restricted the repatriation of profits, and restricted our national and indigenous banks' ability to participate effectively in the international financial systems, even though they have not been found guilty of any financial or security breaches.

Mr. President, the Governments of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) have long recognized and supported the need for common global action against the financing of terrorism, money laundering, organised crime and other illegal activities.

Our countries have worked diligently with non-regional governments and international institutions like the FATF and the CFATF and have instituted domestic legislation to fight money laundering; to restrict the financing of terrorism and to seize the proceeds of crime.

Our leaders acknowledge that the de-risking of correspondent banks is a direct response to the regulatory requirements imposed by those jurisdictions where they operate. We want to see action to remedy its harmful effects on us. The unintended consequences threaten our very economic survival.

The solution lies, we believe, in meaningful dialogue between and among states. Through dialogue, we hope to see the creation of:

“(1) rules-based standards/mechanisms that govern the establishment and maintenance of correspondent banking relationships;

and (2) regulatory changes under which the respondent banks instead of correspondent banks would be sanctioned for AML/CFT violations thereby removing the burden of compliance from the latter.” Like most challenges of global magnitude, this calls for strong international partnerships.

One such partnership is the ‘Samoa Pathway’ which we believe presents a blueprint for SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA). It also highlights durable and genuine partnerships as a cornerstone for achieving the SDGs in SIDS. Additionally, we believe that South-South cooperation, North–South and Triangular Cooperation have served and will continue to serve as an effective platform for technology transfer and capacity-building.

We thank our developed country partners who continue to play a major role in our development and in our efforts to realise the SDGs. Over the years, these countries have stood steadfastly with us in our commitment to improve the lives of our people. _

Assistance with developing sustainable agriculture, tourism and energy, especially with geothermal energy development, have set the platform for sustainable social and economic development, while at the same time combating climate change.

Mr. President, we strongly believe, however, that an effective strategy to realise SDGs will require an overhaul of the manner in which Official Development Assistance (ODA) is executed.

ODA must be more informed by the realities in the recipient countries; it must be more predictable and accessible in a timely manner. For instance, the very unrealistic and arbitrary classification of several small island developing states as **middle income countries - based on the flawed notion of Gross Domestic Product, GDP** - is yet another way in which the efforts of 'small countries' at building economic resilience and sustainable development are systematically undermined.

It is a tendency which completely obscures the reality in SIDS and ignores our inherent characteristics of vulnerability. We will continue to draw attention to the unsuitability of these categorizations.

At the same time, SIDS will continue to explore opportunities within the framework of south-south cooperation. We have been encouraged, in recent times, by the increasing levels of partnership among and between countries of the South. The role of China has become integral to South–South cooperation; and China has demonstrated its willingness and capacity to assist developing countries in critical areas of development.

These have included funding for and construction of essential physical infrastructure as well as providing assistance in equipment and delivery of healthcare services and human resource development.

Equally, Mr. President, countries such as Venezuela and Cuba continue to make durable and significant impact on the healthcare, education and energy landscape of Dominica. Cuba has the capacity to make an even greater contribution to our region and the world once the economic embargo is lifted. Dominica is encouraged by the recent improvement in relations between the Republic of Cuba and the United States of America.

We applaud President Obama’s initiative as progressive and worthy of international support. The critical next step, however, should be the removal of all other impediments to trade and economic activities so that Cuba can fully benefit from the international trading and financial systems.

Even in the face of their own domestic challenges, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela continues to be a reliable partner in development.

Our partnership with the Bolivarian Republic especially over the last decade, has contributed significantly to our own tangible achievements under the MDGs through initiatives such as ALBA and Petro Caribe.

We look forward to our continued partnership and hope for a peaceful and amicable resolution of its current difficulties. A peaceful and stable hemisphere is in the interest of all of us.

Mr. President, within the Caribbean sub-region, we continue to strengthen and deepen both bilateral and multilateral partnerships to promote development and our efforts to achieve the SDGs. The role of regional institutions like the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) have become even more essential in terms of social and economic development.

As a result, we have built institutions that serve the people of our region in every aspect of development. Our regional approach to our common challenges have also garnered better results than if we were to face them individually. CARICOM now provides a critical interface with our development partners in trade, energy, social and economic development.

Mr. President, in the area of energy, CARICOM has adopted and is currently implementing the Caribbean Sustainable Energy Roadmap (C-SERMS).

The goal of C-SERMS is to transform the energy sectors of the Member States by providing secure and sustainable supplies of clean, reliable and affordable energy with stable prices in order to better position the Caribbean Community to achieve the SDGs.

As a result; CARICOM has been partnering with other countries and organizations, both formally and informally to assist its members. One such partnership exists with the Government of Austria, UNIDO and SIDS DOCK to create the Caribbean Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (CCREEE).

CCREEE will serve as a hub for coordinating Caribbean-wide renewable energy and energy efficiency programmes. We expect CCREEE to play a major role in the implementation of the CARICOM energy policies.

Mr. President, given its paramount importance to the future prosperity and sustainable development of the SIDS; I would like briefly to highlight SDG 14, which refers to protection of our seas, oceans and marine resources. The world's oceans and seas are sources of nourishment and nutrition to billions, a major tourism asset and, an important part of our complex ecosystem.

International actions to protect the health of our oceans and seas should be pursued as a matter of urgency. Small and large countries should come together to coordinate efforts and to create a system to regulate activities that affect our oceans and seas.

We commend the efforts and initiatives taken by “Friends of the Oceans”, the Government of Italy, and most recently the initiative of Secretary of State of the United States, the Honourable Mr. John Kerry.

The recent oceans conference in Washington, DC, like its predecessors, highlighted the need to draw greater attention to the ongoing destruction of our oceans resulting from marine pollution and its implications for humanity. We need innovative and global responses. We must also improve public awareness and education on marine pollution and highlight the best practices to protect our oceans.

In that regard, we commend the efforts of representatives and countries advancing the “We are the Oceans” (WATO) concept. Dominica is happy to associate with this initiative which promotes food security, sustainable consumption and production, ocean conservation and biodiversity as a way to meet or even exceed the commitments made by our leaders.

WATO holds great potential for making the issue of our seas and oceans one of the most extensive educational initiatives of the SDGs. We urge member states to join and to work collectively to save our planet for future generations.

Mr. President, collectively, we have the ability to solve the most difficulty challenges of our time.

The unprecedented pace of human advancement in the 21st century has demonstrated that we have the capacity and ingenuity to combat climate change and to develop means of production and consumption to sustain humanity while at the same time protecting our planet.

Mr. President, our efforts to save our planet and to improve the lives of billions of people throughout the world who suffer from hunger and starvation and those who continue to be marginalized, will be pointless without peace and security. The destruction brought about by wars within and between countries continues to displace millions of people from their homes creating an unprecedented refugee crisis.

The threat posed by nuclear weapons especially by the determination of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to develop weapons with the ability to kill millions, is a major threat not only to its neighbors but to people everywhere.

The United Nations must, without hesitation, take strong and decisive action to pursue diplomatic solutions to end the war in Syria and to eliminate the nuclear capability of the DPRK. Similarly, we must as a matter of urgency, work together to defeat the increasing threat of global terrorism.

It is up to us to take the necessary actions.

Thank you, Mr. President