



**PERMANENT MISSION OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC TO THE
UNITED NATIONS**

**STATEMENT BY H. E. MIGUEL VARGAS, MINISTER OF FOREIGN
AFFAIRS OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
AT THE PLENARY OF THE 72ND GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE UNITED NATIONS**

New York, September 20, 2017

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Candidate to the Security Council 2019-2020

His Excellency Mr. Miroslav Lajcak,
President of the 72nd Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations;

His Excellency Mr. Antonio Guterres,
Secretary-General of the UN;

Heads of State and Governments;

Honorable Ministers and Heads of Delegations;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is an honor to participate in this General Assembly of the United Nations, representing the people and government of the Dominican Republic.

Before anything else, I would like to apologize on behalf of Dominican Republic President Danilo Medina, for his absence from this forum, as he had to return to the country to face Hurricane Maria's threat.

This meeting coincides with a devastating season of natural disasters endured by our region for nearly a month; the widespread catastrophe extends to Mexico, hit by two destructive earthquakes, and to the Southern United States, viciously punished by Hurricane Harvey.

In this catalog of human suffering Antigua and Barbuda stand out, but in particular this last one where, according to Prime Minister Gaston Browne, 90% of the infrastructure collapsed.

Not quite has Irma's devastating winds dissipated when there is Maria leaving a new trail of destruction and death, mainly in Dominica.

We express our deep solidarity with the affected countries and the sadness of the people of the Dominican Republic for the destruction and high number of victims.

Accurate figures for damages at Saint Bart, Saint Martin, Anguilla, Virgin Islands, Tortola, Turks and Caicos, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and, particularly, Cuba, and Florida are yet to be determined.

However, we can affirm that there is substantial damage; recovery will take years.

Unfortunately, valuable lives have been lost as well.

Despite the absence of definitive figures, I can tell you, so that you get an idea of how severely we have been affected, that the material losses produced only by this hurricane season far exceed the Gross Domestic Product of the Dominican Republic.

We often tend to focus on material damage and ignore the human suffering caused by these disasters – which lethal power has been enhanced by climate change.

The statistics are striking, but cannot reflect the pain of the victims, their desolation to see so many efforts ruined, so many illusions, so many dreams.

Not merely houses have been lost; homes have been lost.

Well beyond material debris, there are shattered lives.

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary, distinguished delegates;

We must recognize the inherent dangers of climate change, which are way more significant within the context of our Caribbean geography.

Our economies, our way of life, and our development potential are at in danger.

The Caribbean vulnerability and that of our Dominican Republic pose a risk that we cannot face alone.

Although our country has been fortunate not to suffer human losses during the catastrophic passage of Irma, we are aware that, like every other Caribbean island, we will always be vulnerable to this type of phenomenon.

This reality leads us to bring up in this Assembly, once more, the imperative need to join forces to confront these threats.

It compels us to act in a responsible, cohesive way for the sake of our people's lives.

And I would like, if you will allow me, to be very clear in this regard.

It is not enough to send messages of solidarity or humanitarian aid after natural catastrophes have caused death and devastation.

And it is absolutely not enough to sign agreements on climate change.

It is critical for these agreements to be coherent, move forward a joint agenda, and develop concrete action plans.

We are facing a growing challenge, which does not recognize borders, makes us all vulnerable, and demands everybody's cooperation and solidarity –but mainly that of the most developed, most powerful nations.

If we don't want to keep regretting its consequences, we must tackle this reality with maximum responsibility.

Therefore, once more, my country brings before this Assembly the proposal to create a special fund to deal with natural catastrophes, to foster awareness, prevention, and resilience strategies, which will allow us to preserve life.

To illustrate how economic resources can help alleviate the damage caused by natural phenomena let's use the example of the United States.

Right at the aftermath of recent hurricanes, the government, which has the necessary resources, made available a fund of 15,000 million dollars for the reconstruction of the affected states.

Thus providing much needed assistance to their citizens.

On the contrary, there is no way that vulnerable regions, such as the insular Caribbean, can cope on their own with the crushing impact that such a phenomenon has on our people and countries.

I will use my country, the Dominican Republic, as an example:

Because of the rain and floods caused by natural phenomena during the previous year, thousands of kilometers of highways and country roads have been badly damaged.

There are dozens of collapsed bridges; tens of kilometers of collapsed gabion-walls and irrigation channels.

Thousands of hectares of diverse crops indispensable to feed our citizens have been lost as well.

In addition, among other numerous damages, not counting those recently caused by Hurricane Irma, hundreds of homes have been destroyed.

Only to support relief efforts over these months we have invested more than five hundred million dollars.

Thus we fear that similar or even stronger phenomena –triggered by climate change— may delay by ten years or more, our country's and other Caribbean nations' development path.

We are talking about snatching our people's happiness and positive future projections.

We cannot afford to keep down playing this reality.

And it is in this context that the United Nations' role and the solidarity between our countries make sense.

I appeal to you, once again, on behalf of all the children, women, men, and old people who at this moment face the most absolute helplessness.

Let us find ways for the United Nations to help those governments that cannot rebuild their countries on their own in the aftermath of these natural disasters.

Let us take the essential steps to provide timely aid to those in desperate need.

This is central to our responsibility as sister nations.

I would also like to call all member states of the United Nations to reflect on the new actions that we must take, urgently, to counteract extreme climatic phenomena.

There is enough scientific evidence linking human impact on global warming and these natural catastrophes.

It is time to assume our role and act accordingly to stop this situation, if we do not want the future to judge us by our total lack of responsibility.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since its founding 72 years ago, our country has been member of this unique chapter in humankind's history that constitutes the creation of the United Nations.

This organization has since been a beacon that points the way leading humanity away from the abyss guiding us towards a hopeful future.

And this is why we can never fall into complacency.

We know that essential aspects of our civilization such as peace, security, and development are not a gift that has fallen from the sky, nor something we can take for granted.

They result from a collective commitment, which must be continuously renewed.

The Dominican Republic is fully committed to this vision and to the search for integral solutions to the collective challenges facing the international community.

We are determined to contribute strongly to build an increasingly democratic, increasingly participatory, and increasingly efficient United Nations to help solve our people's pressing problems.

Thank you very much.