



Commonwealth of Dominica

Address by

HON. FRANCINE BARON

Minister for Foreign and CARICOM Affairs of the
Commonwealth of Dominica

On the occasion of the

73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly

September 29, 2018

United Nations, New York

Secretary General of the United Nations,
President of the General Assembly
Distinguished Heads of Delegations,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Madam President, I congratulate you on your appointment and my delegation extends best wishes to you for a productive tenure, as you seek to direct the affairs of this important institution, in the interest of humanity.

Madam President:

There are few moments in the history of a nation, that captures the resilience, fortitude and strength of its people. For us that moment came on September 18, last year, when Hurricane Maria unleashed its fury of 180 miles per-hour winds that, brought Dominica to its knees.

Immediately after the raging winds and the torrential down pours subsided, our people, raised their battered and wounded selves and began the daunting task of search and rescue, clearing roadways and quickly moved thereafter into a rebuilding mode.

Madam President:

I am proud to stand here, one year later, representing a people who have fought against adversity from that day, to attain some form of normalcy in their lives.

I am proud to be representing students who spent months away from classrooms, who endured the inconvenience of no electricity no internet and the disruption of living in shelters, but who attained some of the highest scores, on the recently concluded Caribbean secondary school examinations.

I am proud to stand here representing farmers, who have gone back to their fields and are now harvesting fresh produce to feed our people and for export.

I applaud Dominicans far and wide for being part of the relief efforts and the rebuilding process, but I salute in particular those at home, who walked for miles every day, up, down, and across the island, to be of service. Who worked countless hours to save lives, to provide essential services and to deliver vital supplies to those in need.

Hurricane Maria wreaked havoc on Dominica, but the world must be told of the strength of Dominicans, our tenacity and our determination as a people.

The efforts of our people were keenly matched by the outpouring of support that we received from members of this UN family. From our brothers and sisters in the Caribbean region, to our international partners and friends. Ordinary men and women across the globe reached out to us, to lend a helping hand. As we speak scores of volunteers are on the ground, helping with the rebuilding efforts.

The tremendous support that we have received from regional response agencies and international organisations, both within and outside the UN system, and institutions like the World Bank, all of these efforts have contributed significantly to the progress that we have made thus far.

We cannot on this occasion single out those many persons, countries and organisations, that reached out to us, but the people of Dominica are eternally grateful, to all of you for standing with us in our darkest hour. Thank you all.

Madam President,

A few days following the passage of Hurricane Maria, our Prime Minister, Honourable Roosevelt Skerrit, stood before this august body and sounded a call for action. He called for the world to wake up and take note, that the war of climate change, had come to our shores.

He echoed a call to all countries big and small; developed and developing, to come together to save our planet. One year later, where are we? What have we done? What have we achieved?

Among and around us are many who still deny the reality of climate change. We have not, as a global community, agreed upon a plan for implementation of the commitments made in Paris at COP21. Additionally, we have not mobilized the resources to capitalize the 100 billion dollars per year, which was agreed upon, to assist the most vulnerable, to adapt and mitigate against the harmful effects of climate change.

While we have failed to live up to these commitments, arctic ice shelves continue to melt at an alarming rate. The oceans continue to get warmer; hurricanes and storms continue to develop and threaten our countries, drought becomes more severe and flooding more pronounced. Climate change is therefore the global responsibility of our time. I do not even for a brief moment say this lightly.

How could I, standing here, in this forum that appeals to our universal humanity?

Madam President:

We live in a world in which too many children go hungry night after night. A world in which light arms and small weapons continue to infiltrate our most vulnerable societies. A world in

which non-communicable diseases account for so many preventable deaths.

Yes! I agree! Poverty, inequality and violence are shared responsibilities, too; But their modern-day manifestations are wrapped up in climate change.

Climate change arises from activities that support and reflect inequalities, and always, it is the poor who suffer most. It is the poor whose lands are impacted by severe droughts and flooding, whose homes are destroyed and loved ones perish. It is the poor who have the least capacity to escape the heavy burdens, of poverty, disease, and death.

Madam President:

Much violence stems directly from climate-change induced scarcity of things, like water, or productive lands. Climate change is the main symptom of our world's broken economy, society and humanity.

Distinguished Delegates:

This is precisely the issues for which we have assembled our United Nations. Let this not be just another moment, to simply sharpen the rhetoric or to speak merely of redoubling current efforts.

We have done that too many times before – yet watched climate change ravage on, regardless.

While we pontificate and engage in a perpetual debate, climate change will march on, laying waste to our forests and fields, whipping up the fury of angry winds and punishing rains, wrecking lives and livelihoods.

It is no secret that the lack of motivation by some countries to take the required actions, is rooted in this economic truth: **that those who gain most from the activities that create climate change, remain the most removed from its dire consequences.**

Since climate change is the result of an economic calculus, that will keep pushing global destruction further and further along, it must be accepted as the responsibility of our time. One we must put our collective efforts behind to arrest.

Madam President:

It was only after Prime Minister Skeritt left this Hall last year, that the international experts completed the post disaster needs assessment for Dominica. Their conclusions disclosed that a single hurricane, in a few hours, caused loss and damage equivalent to 226% of our country's GDP. A mere two years prior, a tropical storm, had wiped out the equivalent of 90% of our GDP.

The cost of building back better, of building a resilient nation, comes with a price tag far in excess of what small developing states, like Dominica, are able to meet singlehandedly. This is exacerbated by the debilitating impact these events have on economic activities, depriving the country of much needed revenue at a critical time.

As I speak to you this minute, dangerous storms are gathering in the western Atlantic. As climate change warms the seas and feeds the rainstorms, the risk of future loss and damage grow.

Yet, the price of production and consumption of goods that contribute to climate change, is not set to compensate us for our losses and damages, resulting from it.

Madam President:

From the perspective of our shared destiny, these goods will be over-produced and over-consumed. Climate change is not a freak of nature. It is as man-made, as power and greed.

The 'polluter pays' is an accepted principle - a golden nexus of morality, economics and environmental policy.

The 'polluter pays' is tried and tested at the national level. But, alas, on the international level, it is the victim who pays.

Consider the insurance model championed by many industrialised countries and international agencies, as the solution to climate change.

Island states on the front line are being asked to take out additional insurance against the losses and damage, which are the direct results of a change in climate caused by others. This is asking the victim to pay by installment.

The insane equivalent would be the arsonist saying to you, that instead of trying to stop him setting fire to your house, you should take on fire insurance.

Distinguished Delegates:

If our principal response to man-made climate change, is to make it easier for the victims to foot the bill, then the march of climate change will press on unimpeded.

This, therefore, is untenable, indefensible and downright unacceptable.

Madame President:

The game changer would be, establishing a different kind of insurance, especially for vulnerable and 'at-risk' countries like ours, that pays out quickly to the victims of climate disasters.

Fairness requires that this insurance mechanism must be funded by those who have contributed most to climate change. Additionally, this needs to be scaled up as a matter of urgency.

We have a Caribbean Risk Insurance Fund which paid out funds vital for the immediate relief efforts, but it does not have the capacity to insure against loss and damage.

Today, I wish to propose that the United Nations oversee a **'Climate Loss and Damage Insurance Fund,'** where premiums are paid by those who have contributed most and continue to contribute to climate change and that payouts go quickly to those who suffer the direct consequences of climate disasters, once independently declared to be such.

Madam President:

Ending the inequality that separates those who gain and those who lose will remove the fuel lines of climate change. This is what an international community serious about halting climate change, must do.

Madam President:

We urge you to do this and we hope your feet are swift. Because we can no longer afford to wait. Our people needed sanctuary and safety yesterday, not tomorrow.

In the past twelve months, while contending with the sheer hard graft of relief and early recovery efforts, housing the vulnerable

and restoring essential services, Dominica instituted a plan to **make it the first climate resilient nation in the world.**

We have drafted legislation to establish the Climate Resilience Executing Agency of Dominica, (CREAD) which will deliver the projects that will achieve this goal. We have recruited its leadership and identified a billion dollars' worth of critical projects to compliment this plan. We have rolled up our sleeves and started work.

Our plan is based around designing super-resilient networks, water-proofing our economy and building resilient communities. As we have critically examined the core of what it takes to be resilient, we have found that what looked insurmountable from a distance, is not so daunting up close.

Distinguished delegates:

This realization has buoyed up our confidence and re-energised every Dominican. By the grace of God, therefore, and with the continued support of our partners in the global community, we will become the first climate resilient nation in the world.

We encourage other vulnerable small island states, to embark on building resilience to climate change. The costs, however, are above and beyond the capacity of small states. Support from the international organizations and Member States, with the requisite technical expertise and financial resources is critical.

The role of the UN is therefore central in coordinating and mobilizing resources. The creation of a special International Climate Change Resilience Facility, to provide technical and financial resources, should be given most urgent attention. The existing global economic and development architecture must facilitate this new development paradigm.

Official Development Assistance (ODA) must be re-engineered to take into account the vulnerability of small island states and the imperative of building resilience to climate change. The international financial institutions (IFIs) must rethink the classification of debt and the terms and conditions of debt financing, for essential services and vital infrastructure.

While we battle the effects of climate change, we are supremely conscious that there are many other challenges confronting our region and indeed the wider world.

Two emerging global problems brought on by climate change is that of climate migration and disaster refugees. Although not yet full blown, some countries that act as safe havens have begun to feel the pressures. This further underscores, that the emerging problems brought on by the effects of climate change, require urgent global attention.

Dominica calls on these United Nations, to begin the discourse on both climate migration and disaster refugees, while it is still early.

Madam President;

We champion our region as a Zone of Peace. We remain extremely concerned about the situation in our sister countries of Venezuela and Nicaragua. We call for support for a process of dialogue, to achieve a peaceful resolution, for the benefit of the citizens of those nations, while respecting and observing the time honored international norms, of respect for sovereignty and the non-interference in the internal affairs of other Nations.

Madam President:

Over many years, this body has debated resolutions to end the economic and financial blockade of our sister country Cuba. We

have long established that maintaining this trade embargo can only have a negative impact on our brothers and sisters in Cuba.

Notwithstanding its limitations, the Republic of Cuba has come to the aid of so many around the world, particularly in the areas of healthcare and education and sometimes in the most trying of circumstances. We add our voice once again to the chorus of voices calling for an end to this blockade.

Dominica is in support of a United Nations, where young people, who account for over forty-percent of the world's population, can pursue a global youth agenda, with opportunities to dialogue on key issues that impact their development. Similarly, we congratulate the stakeholder group of Persons with Disabilities and other non-state actors for efforts at advancing opportunities for persons with disabilities, to ensure they remain part of the United Nations agenda.

Madam President, Distinguished Colleagues,
If we keep looking down at our feet, we will die of sorrow. We choose to look up. We move forward knowing we are not alone on this challenging journey.

Twelve months ago, the international community heard our cry and have stood with us. This has made us stronger and more motivated. To those who came,, we thank you and urge you to stay the course over these next few years.

Let us set the example for a better future for all mankind.

Let history record what we did and not what we said. What efforts we made to end the march of climate change globally, and to reduce our vulnerabilities locally.

We, together, must grasp this moment.

Thank you and God Bless these United Nations!