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United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States

Statement by

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During the briefing on Climate Change and Migration for the SIDS

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New York**

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to this briefing on Climate Change and Migration for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) co-organized by UN-OHRLLS and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Your presence demonstrates the value you attach to issues of climate change and migration, issues that have a significant impact on the sustainable development of SIDS. This briefing is organized to stimulate an exchange on the climate-migration nexus in SIDS, focusing on current policy developments and programmatic responses in the SIDS context; sharing examples of innovative programmes and policies to address climate migration; and reflecting on necessary future programming.

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

It is almost a foregone conclusion that SIDS are at the mercy of climate change and the growing negative impacts, including forced migration and displacement. Climate change and disasters are, and will continue to be, major drivers of migration and displacement. The poor are the most vulnerable to climate change. They are likely to live in high-risk areas, have less means to prepare, and lack information to anticipate, and respond to a disaster. Yet they are also the people who will find it hardest to migrate. The latter is aptly reflected in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report which notes that ‘vulnerability is inversely correlated with mobility, leading to those being most exposed and vulnerable to the impacts of climate change having the least capability to migrate’.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

Climate change displacement and unplanned relocation are highly disruptive to livelihoods, culture and society; and require proper, well-planned interventions to support the people of SIDS in their efforts to adapt to the challenges.

Regardless of the form of migration: whether it is a temporal move due to climate related disasters, or a permanent one due to recurrent events; or whether it is because of worsening slow onset deterioration of the environment such as the sea level rise posing an existential threat to some SIDS; or an adaptation strategy in response to environmental pressures and other factors, it is clear that a concerted effort is required to respond effectively to the effects of migration and displacement as a result of climate change.

An essential element of our response must be to implement National Adaptation Plans (or NAPs) – a point which I also make in my role as a UNFCCC NAPs Champion. We must also address the root cause of the problem, by mitigating greenhouse gas emissions.

It could also be to inform migrants of risk and build their capacity to cope in new locations. For those who are forced to move internationally, bilateral agreements and international frameworks should protect their rights, while ensuring national policies also factor in the needs of and impact

on new climate-induced migrants, who can put additional pressure on infrastructure and services at destination.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The international community is increasingly focusing on climate change migration and displacement, but more still needs to be done. Both the Paris Agreement and Sendai Framework have some elements of climate-induced migration in their frameworks which could be further developed to ensure a holistic approach to avert, minimize and address displacement related to adverse impacts of climate change, including extreme events. While the SDGs, in particular SDG 13 on climate action does not make explicit mention of migration or displacement, SDGs 8, 10 and 17 point to the need for facilitated, planned and well-managed migration policies. Initiatives like the Nansen Initiative and the Platform on Disaster Displacement are also steps in the right direction.

Let me also recall that in preparation for a high-level meeting to address large movements of refugees and migrants, last year, the UN Secretary General issued a report ‘in safety and dignity: addressing large movements of refugees and migrants’, which identifies climate change as a factor which will drive future human mobility. The same is also reflected in the Outcome Document of the UN Summit for Refugees and Migrants which notes that:

Some people move in search of new economic opportunities and horizons. Others move to escape armed conflict, poverty, food insecurity, persecution, terrorism, or human rights violations and abuses. Still others do so in response to the adverse effects of climate change, natural disasters (some of which may be linked to climate change) or other environmental factors. Many move, indeed, for a combination of these reasons.

It is noteworthy that the elements mentioned here, from poverty to human rights violations, are additionally exacerbated by the effects of climate change.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

While the effect of climate change is a global phenomenon, SIDS will continue to be among the earliest and most affected countries. Migration and displacement therefore is a critical issue for SIDS. Once more, SIDS are leading from the front as evidenced in the call by Tuvalu to the UN General Assembly through a resolution to develop a legal regime to protect people displaced by the impacts of climate change.

While we talk of migration and displacement, we should not be under the impression that people want to leave their homelands. Maintaining sovereignty, self-determination, cultural identity and territorial rights are of primary concern to SIDS. Forced displacement is a last option, and therefore SIDS need full support to build strategies to adapt to the impacts of climate change and find ways of building back better after climate related disasters have struck.

As we look ahead, increased efforts are needed by both SIDS themselves and their development partners to manage climate change migration and displacement. Building ‘resilience for all’ is

synonymous to leaving no one behind. It can help to reduce the number of people displaced by disasters or forced to leave as a result of deteriorating environmental conditions. Investment in building resilience and adaptive capacity could help reduce displacement and forced migration. It is therefore important to share best practices and lessons learned from the policies, practices and knowledge with the SIDS. The importance of technology transfer can therefore not be overemphasized. The successful examples need to be scaled up and supported.

I am certain that this briefing will contribute towards the dialogue on how we can collectively support SIDS on climate change and migration. As part of the work of my office, rest assured that we will continue to advocate for SIDS and their issues.

Thank you for your kind attention.