Remarks

by

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“Vulnerable economies and climate change”

at the Heads of State Panel
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HE Mr Allan Chastanet, Prime Minister of St Lucia
Hon Dr Hussein Rasheed Hassan, Minister of Environment, Maldives
My colleagues Dr Kituyi, Secretary General UNCTAD
Ms Tatiana Valovaya, Director General of UN office in Geneva

Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Colleagues and friends
I am sure we all sit here happy to enjoy bearable temperatures! But, is this an exception or the norm?

In August, the World Meteorological Organization reported that this past July maybe broke the record for the hottest month since we have data.

Hurricane Dorian is the second-strongest Atlantic storm on record. The worst ever to strike The Bahamas. The reporting shows us unprecedented damage. Not to mention loss of lives, wounded and numerous people who remain unaccounted for.

Is this our new norm - devastating extreme weather events taking lives and livelihoods?

It is not this audience that I need to tell how it is the peoples of the Small Island Developing States, the Least Developed Countries and the Land-locked Developing Countries among the most vulnerable of our shared planet.

Their very geography, their stage of and overall development settings make them most vulnerable to present and projected climate change impacts.

Yet, it is these countries, their people, contributing the least to global warming.

I just attended on behalf of the Secretary-General the Pacific Islands Forum held this August in Tuvalu.

At the meeting, and once more, Pacific leaders insisted on how urgent, how existential it is that the IPCC Special Report on 1.5 degrees is acted on. Time has run out for words and tokens of action - we need concerted and expedited action, we need major steps now lest we are willing to simply accept a new reality of catastrophes.

Pacific leaders adopted the Forum Communiqué and the “Kainaki II Declaration for Urgent Climate Change Action Now”.

This Declaration as well as the Boe Declaration which was adopted at last year’s Pacific island Leaders Forum highlight in no uncertain terms the many and also the security risks posed by climate change.

SIDS by their very location and geographic nature are confronted with profound structural challenges and disadvantages documented and analyzed extensively.
The world community was already alerted during the first Barbados Conference which followed the 1992 Rio Conference how slow onset events of sea-level rise and would directly threaten lives and livelihoods.

I let you do the math on time since gone by.

It is somewhat of an understatement to say that there is urgency of action now!

These slow, and may be no longer so slow,..., onset events and specifically sea level rise causing loss of land and forcing internal and external migration can not be underestimated. These events raise fundamental issues of sovereignty, state integrity, national identity and in some cases do pose threats to military and defense installations.

These are intricate, often highly technical but also expensive - in every sense of the word - challenges. Yet, countries face limited institutional capacity and difficulties in accessing finance and resources.

Add to this the low per capita GNI in LDCs limiting their domestic ability to build resilience and respond to disasters and you have what I called a few months ago " the perfect storm ".

As we are confronted with more frequent and more powerful extreme weather events I venture to predict that we will see more and more destroyed vital infrastructure, negative impacts on tourism and the tradeable sectors countries live from, reduced land availability contributing to basic food insecurity, potable water scarcity, and populations being displaced and relocated.

Is this what we want?

The damage from disasters sets countries back for years if not decades. The damage and lack of action can set us back years on progress made on the respective Programmes of Action the global community adopted and the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs.

Climate change just simply is no longer just a security “threat-multiplier.”

It is a truly existential threat to people, communities and nations. It is a threat impacting not only the path to sustainable development but also on keeping peace and security.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In just two weeks’ time, 150 Heads of State or Government will gather in New York for the start of the 74th session of the General Assembly.
The Secretary-General’s Climate Action Summit takes place on 23 September.

The Summit is both our opportunity and our responsibility to boost ambition and accelerate actions to implement the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

The weekend immediately before is devoted to a Youth Climate Summit and a day of roundtables on the nine action areas of the Climate Summit.

The Summit must mobilize world leaders to launch initiatives and actions to upgrade their Nationally Determined Contributions in the lead-up to the deadline of 2020.

Let me just say this - so many young people all over the world tell us that they no longer want to hear words, they want to see action!

The Secretary-General’s Special Envoy for the Climate Summit, H.E. Mr. Luis Alfonso de Alba, has been working hard with delegations in New York and the capitals to come up with a compelling and comprehensive set of initiatives.

By all accounts, the response to date has been overwhelmingly positive.

We owe to our children, our grand-children and future generations to show deeds.

Major ambition is needed NOW in our mitigation efforts if we are to stay within the 1.5-degree threshold.

The switch to and access for all to renewable forms of energy lies at the core.

At the same time we must drastically and speedily step up our support for the developing countries – especially for adaptation in the most vulnerable countries!

The fact though is that we have a serious shortfall between the available financial resources for adaptation in LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs as compared to the estimated requirements to meet their adaptation challenges and build resilience.

I encourage all development partners to contribute ambitiously to the ongoing replenishment of the Green Climate Fund. I encourage all partners to find ways to facilitate access to available funds to ensure action on the ground.
This is an important signal to give the developing countries to raise ambition and speed up achieving their own climate commitments.

We must also accelerate the process of preparation of National Adaptation Plans by end 2020.

The NAPs do play a critical role.

The NAPs help in developing a systematic approach for countries to integrate climate change considerations into policy decision-making and implementation.

We also must accelerate our implementation of the Sendai Framework and improve our recovery processes. The cutoff date of 2020 for Sendai Targets to substantially increase the number of national and local strategies for disaster risk reduction is approaching fast.

As for the contribution of the United Nations system, risk-informed and risk-mitigating investment in the SDGs must lie at the centre of the new generation of UN sustainable development cooperation framework.

The ongoing efforts to achieve this, led by UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Resident Coordinators with the UN system entities, is critically important.

I am happy to report to you that at the upcoming Climate Change Summit, the most vulnerable nations will make every effort to set the tone in the hope for others to follow.

I applaud their ambitious stance and it is a stance they will adopt at the Summit.

The SIDS will present a comprehensive package of initiatives for ambitious climate action, as well as a series of national announcements. The package includes an Alliance if small island states commitments on new or updated NDCs as well as a list of SIDS pledging to long-term low greenhouse emissions development strategies that are consistent with the 1.5-degree scenario.

These messages will be reinforced throughout the high level week. This will particularly be the case during the high-level Midterm Review of the SAMOA Pathway, which will set the stage for the next phase of implementation of the SIDS Sustainable Development Agenda.

The LDCs are collectively launching a political “Call for Action” to all Member States to raise ambition for climate adaptation and resilience.
They are also launching - as a separate initiative - their own LDC Initiative for Effective Adaptation and Resilience, under which they pledge unconditionally to achieve their 2050 Vision for a climate resilient future.

Dozens of other initiatives will be announced.

It is my hope that collectively this sends a strong message to the international community. Together we all must take ambitious action in the lead up to the 2020 deadline for updating NDCs.

A holistic and coherent vision, backed up by resources and capacity-strengthening, is needed to give the peoples of the LDCs, LLDCs and especially the SIDS the support to achieve their sustainable development goals in today’s rapidly changing world.

Just as much as climate change impact cuts across all sectors and segments of society indeed, climate action should go hand in hand with measures to boost productive capacity, increase value-addition and alleviate debt.

New technologies offer unprecedented and great opportunities to manage, to combat climate change.

The Secretary-General’s Climate Change Summit provides us all with the platform for catalyzing ambitious action and at the same time inject this great sense of urgency.

We need the full engagement of all stakeholders, to build momentum towards CO25 and COP26.

We need to heed what the young tell us - enough words, action now!

Thank you.