Opening Remarks

for

Ms. Fekitamoeloa Katoa ‘Utoikamanu

Under Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States

Side Event
Advancing on Loss and Damage: Perspectives from Small Island Developing States
COP25

10 December 2019
11:00 AM -12:30 PM
AOSIS/5CS Pavilion, Madrid, Spain
Your Excellency, Lois Michele Young, Permanent Representative of Belize to the UN and Chair of AOSIS

Honourable Romauld Ferreira, Minister of the Environment and Housing of the Bahamas

Honourable Molwyn Joseph, Minister of Health, Wellness and the Environment of Antigua and Barbuda

Distinguished Panel Members

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would first like to warmly welcome you all to this high-level side event on Loss and Damage and concrete and practical implementation of the Warsaw International Mechanism (WIM). It is an honour for OHRLLS to continue the convening of these important events on the margins of the United Nations Climate Change Conferences on the issue of Loss and Damage, and we wish to express our profound thanks to AOSIS for helping in the organisation of this gathering.

It is critical now more than ever to continue our discussions on Loss and Damage, to ensure that we progress our work within the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and this year’s review of the WIM, particularly in light of the key findings of the Special Reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) on 1.5°C and Oceans and the Cryosphere.

What is clear is that the effects of human induced climate change are worse than previously projected and that the associated risks have increased immensely, almost to a point of no return, for our ecosystems, economies and human wellbeing.

The IPCC report on Global Warming of 1.5°C indicates that even warming at 1.5°C amplifies the exposure to the risks associated with sea level rise, including increased saltwater intrusion, flooding and damage to infrastructure.

Similarly, the IPCC report on Oceans and the Cryosphere confirms that human communities in close connection with coastal environments, especially Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are particularly exposed to changes in the ocean, such as sea level rise and extreme sea level and ocean acidification. SIDS are projected to experience historical centennial events at least annually by 2050, inflicting Loss and Damage to their livelihoods, income, cultural identity and health. Some island nations are also likely to become uninhabitable due to climate related ocean and cryosphere change.

The report further notes that low-lying islands and coasts have the lowest adaptive capacity, and that for small island states even after investing in major adaptation efforts, residual risks and associated losses are projected to occur.
Indeed, for SIDS, the reports confirm that small islands face disproportionately higher risks from climate change warming of 1.5°C, and as big ocean states, for many SIDS, these risks threaten their very survival.

We have only begun to see the devastating impacts of climate change, as we are experiencing the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. Just this past September, the Bahamas was hit by Hurricane Dorian, resulting in initial damages already totalling US$3.4 billion, equal to one-fourth of the island nation’s GDP. The catastrophic 2017 Atlantic hurricane season, affecting many Caribbean SIDS, caused an estimated 3,300 deaths, with damages estimated at $282 billion USD. In Dominica, Hurricane Maria, resulted in total damages of US$930.9 million or 226 percent of their 2016 gross domestic product (GDP). In the Pacific, Tropical Cyclone Gita, Winston, and Pam hit Tonga, Fiji, and Vanuatu costing up to 38, 33, and 64 percent of their GDPs respectively.

There is no denying the urgency with which we must all respond, raising our collective ambition to effectively address this global challenge. Limiting global warming to 1.5°C remains feasible, and we must take the necessary climate action to do so now, including in the areas of finance, technology transfer and capacity building.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With the finalization of the review of the WIM on Loss and Damage here at COP25, it is imperative that we strengthen the global response to climate change in the context of sustainable development, increasing the linkages between the work of the WIM towards concrete and practical solutions to address loss and damage.

We must ensure that the particularly vulnerable countries such as small island developing states and least developed countries are not left behind and are able address loss and damage with the commensurate level of support to do so.

As the High Representative for LDCs, LLDCS, and SIDS, my Office stands ready to work with all of you to enhance the synergies between efforts to catalyse more ambitious climate action with wider sustainable development objectives here at COP25. My Office will work to ensure that, in these efforts, the focus remains squarely on SIDS. OHRLLS within its mandate will enhance its global advocacy efforts to encourage accelerated implementation of the SAMOA Pathway and 2030 Agenda.

Ultimately, we stand ready to support SIDS, as a special case for sustainable development in view of their unique and particular vulnerabilities, and in view of them being particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.

Thank you all again for your participation and contribution to this event.