



Intervention by the Alliance of Small Island States
At the High-Level Debate on “International Migration and Development”
Convened by the President of the General Assembly Pursuant to UNGA Resolution 73/241

27 February 2019 (10:00am)
ECOSOC Chamber

For many of us in small island developing states, climate change is a reality and a driver of migration. Each hurricane and typhoon, and each centimeter of sea-level rise has the potential to destabilize and to force people from their homes and communities, to uproot lives and cripple economies.

In 2017 Hurricanes Irma and Maria devastated the islands of Barbuda and Dominica. Hurricane Irma crossed Barbuda with winds of 185 miles per hour and destroyed everything in its path. Ninety percent of homes were completely destroyed and the island became practically inhabitable. Fearing a second hit two days later from Hurricane Jose, Barbuda’s residents were evacuated to the larger island of Antigua. But even after relocation was allowed, the residents of Barbuda could not return. There was simply nothing to return to.

When Hurricane Maria passed over the island of Dominica, it tore apart its infrastructure, damaged almost all of its homes, destroyed farms, devastated the natural habit and left the country in shambles. The damages and losses in Dominica were 226% of GDP. School-aged children and persons who lost their homes and livelihoods relocated with families to neighboring countries.

Both hurricanes highlighted the importance of the principles we noted and adopted in the Sendai Framework, and yet struggle to implement – investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience and preparedness is important, in effect ‘building back better’ in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction can guarantee a safer future.

In the Pacific, the rising seas have forced many persons to relocate, so too has the salination of their agricultural plots and drought in some instances. In some countries, almost a quarter of persons who migrate cite climate change impacts as the impetus for their move to new homes or onto new land to reinstate their livelihoods.

The forced migration of persons following these natural disasters and environmental degradation has considerable impacts on social and economic development. Health and education systems are strained, and vulnerable groups are made even more vulnerable.

Historically, people have migrated for a number of reasons: including political, economic or due to conflict. However, the growing number of extreme weather events due to climate change are increasingly contributing to migration. The trajectory is not linear, but can be described as following a path where climate change effects induce greater levels of migration, which in turn places added costs and challenges to development. The Paris Agreement foresees the onslaught of impacts that will be brought about by climate change and migration and establishes a dedicated task force to advance strategies that avert, minimize and address displacement related to climate change.

While we can be highly confident about the scientific argument for climate change, the effects on the future distribution of the human population are less clear. We in the small island states of the world know though that there is little time to lose. We are feeling the effects of climate change now. We are observing greater patterns of mobility of our citizens both internally and internationally. And, in countries with already numerous environmental, social and economic challenges, hard-earned development gains can be easily lost.

We therefore urge the international community to be forward-looking in their approach to the future of migration.