



Commonwealth of Dominica

Address by

Dr. Hon. Roosevelt Skerri

Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Dominica

On the occasion of

**High-Level Conference for the Reconstruction and
resilience of CARICOM Countries Affected by Hurricanes
Irma and Maria**

November 21, 2017

9:00 a.m.

United Nations, New York

SALUTATION:

- Heads of Government and in Particular Chairman of CARICOM
- Excellency, the United Nations Secretary General
- Excellency, the President of the General Assembly
- Excellences
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for this opportunity to dialogue with partners, donors and our longstanding friends as we prepare to launch Dominica as a climate resilient state.

We are immensely grateful and touched by your support and solidarity. Considering that we are amongst friends, united in common cause, I know you expect me to be frank, and so, I want to use my brief opening remarks to make a couple observations that we believe should inform our actions today and the days ahead.

According to the Post Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA), Hurricane Maria caused damages and losses that amounted to 226% of our entire national GDP.

When numbers get too large to imagine, there is a danger that they leave people numb. To put this into perspective, the enormous human disaster of the Indian Ocean tsunami, incomparable regards the loss of human life, wrought damage and losses of 90% of GDP of Aceh province in Indonesia, the most badly hit area, and 1% of Indonesia's national GDP.

Hurricane Maria's 226% damage and loss come just two years after Tropical Storm Erika, inflicted damage and losses of 90% of our national GDP. Erika came four years after Tropical Storm Ophelia that also wrought massive damage.

The scale and frequency of the damages and losses means there is no commercial premium we could pay that would insure us against the magnitude of these injuries.

The science of climate change shows that the warming of the seas is leading to more rapidly intensifying and wetter storms. Consequently, no commercial insurance firm would offer the insurance we need. Insurance works best when risks are uncorrelated and random, we must now accept the fact that with climate change, this is guaranteed to change.

Indeed, we need to worry that premiums on what they are currently prepared to insure will increase significantly impacting the cost of the recovery as many donors will insist on insurance for many things.

Ultimately, the only route available to us is to build a nation resilient to climate change rather than to insure against damages and losses caused to one that is not.

That is why we are committed to creating the first climate resilient nation. It is not an ill-considered promise; it is essential to our existence. We are prepared to be the game changer.

That is not to say that we are against insurance-like mechanisms, where a certifiable event, unlocks immediate financial assistance, to cover for example our relief needs. This is a good idea. Quick delivery is essential. Most of the initial funds that reached Dominica post Hurricane Maria were insurance funds.

Notwithstanding, these facilities are not of a meaningful size and to make them so will require donors to commit to grants which would get premiums down to a digestible size. Even if we only insured the cost of immediate relief, we reckon this would cost around 3% of our GDP and rising.

We also know that resiliency is not just about buildings; it is about sustainable livelihoods; it is about resilient networks of energy and communications; it is about resilient agriculture and irrigation systems. These things have informed the recovery and rebuilding plan and our prioritization of expenditures within the PDNA that we presented to you yesterday and will look at again later today.

Another essential observation is that we cannot do aid delivery in the way we have done it.

We have been working on projects, not yet delivered, that we envisaged after Tropical Storm Ophelia in 2011. There is enough blame for that to go around everyone. But, it is telling that this problem is not unique to us, or to that particular time and so there is something wrong with the system. This time around, faced with a 226% damage and loss we cannot afford a repetition of normal.

The PDNA, has underscored that, after years of social policies that led to a halving of poverty rates, any delayed response to the challenges caused by Maria could lead to a reversal of our success. Poverty rates could increase and our efforts at achieving the sustainable development goals could be hampered.

We therefore need to move quickly with the implementation of priority projects and programs. There must be delivery mechanisms that eliminate layers of bureaucracy between donors and beneficiaries that shortens the distance between the two, so that there can be responsive feedback and more immediate removals of what may be external issues and local obstacles.

We have studied our own experiences carefully. We have looked around the world at how different countries have handled disasters in, for example, the US, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nepal, Haiti and elsewhere in the Caribbean. We have been working with DFID and the World Bank on a new Execution Agency.

It will be a co-ordination war room, reducing duplication and redundancies, maximizing the local connectivity of projects and their developmental impact, employing a balance of international expertise and local knowledge, with local ownership of a master plan. It will operate at the highest standards of transparency and financial management.

Our intention is to appoint early the chair of a donor-driven supervisory board with clear control over assurance functions like audit and anti-fraud.

I will talk more about delivery today, for now I will end here and again, thank all of those who have stood with us in this moment of tragedy special thanks must go to the United Nations, World Bank and Caribbean Community.

Thank you!