

Excellencies,

High-level officials

Fellow Climate Champions

I am pleased to address you today as we discuss one of the most defining problems of our time.

Climate change is no longer a distant issue for some; it is an existential threat to all of humanity.

The rate in which the climate is changing should cause all to panic, engendering a strong global response.

Every day the world faces new climate-related devastations, that have become more frequent and impactful.

No country, no community, no one is immune and no one is safe until all are safe.

Unfortunately, it is vulnerable small island states that continue to suffer disproportionately from the devastating consequences of climate change, despite their negligible emissions of green house gases.

Year after year, cycle after cycle, our islands continue to face the unrelenting forces of tropical cyclones, prolonged droughts, sea level rise, ocean acidification and shifting weather patterns.

Such events are becoming more frequent, more severe and will become even worse unless we act urgently.

As temperatures continue to rise, the ocean continues to warm, we are witnessing unprecedented changes in global marine ecosystems.

And life on earth for humanity as it currently is, is becoming more and more unbearable.

Climate change currently inflicts harm on vulnerable individuals, especially children, the elderly and women.

From increased poverty and food insecurity, to growing water stresses and accelerated environmental damage; climate change is a clear and present threat to our planet and all of human civilization.

Excellencies,

As climate change makes some parts of the earth uninhabitable; a climate migration crisis looms that the international community is not prepared to address.

Ironically, the countries from which the most climate migrants will emerge, are the ones that contribute the least to climate change.

This climate injustice challenging developing countries will result in substantial social, economic and environmental consequences for them.

The impact, of this climate crisis if it continues unabated, will increase inequality within and amongst countries and will force entire populations to seek refuge elsewhere.

The future weapons of mass destruction will not be bombs or guns; they will be scorching temperatures, persistent droughts, rising tides and, ferocious winds making our planet uninhabitable.

Climate migration is a real phenomenon, and as time passes, the influx of climate migrants will turn to climate refugees.

Why should innocent vulnerable populations be forced to move from their homeland, leaving behind their cultural artifacts, customs and geographical roots?

The loss of an entire heritage cannot be replaced or compensated and therefore should be protected.

Unfortunately, climate-change induced loss of heritage, draws much less political and international attention than its biophysical effects.

That is why, vulnerable developing states, especially small island states should continue to advocate strenuously for a reduction in emissions and for climate justice.

In order to effectively fight climate change, we need as much climate activists, as we need climate scientists.

We can't all be scientists, but we all can certainly be climate activists.

And as activists, we must be stridently vocal and loud.

Our voices should not be subdued by fear and inducements; we must stand tall on principle, as we fight unrelentingly to end ecocide; protecting our planet from destruction, emanating from the unbridled greed and destructive nature of mankind.

As an example, it appears that the protection of the fossil fuel industry is now a priority in the pursuit of extortionate profits, at the expense of climate vulnerable SIDS.

Depressingly, we now run the risk of our countries disappearing as a result of sea level rise from warming oceans and melting glaciers.

Today, I ask this distinguished group of global citizens: is it fair and just, that powerful countries could profiteer from the irresponsible and profligate use of fossil fuels at the expense of the obliteration of SIDS civilizations? Is it fair?

I say to you unapologetically, that it is unjust and unconscionable, a dastardly wicked act; in essence, they are committing fossil fuel genocide.

If governments have lost their moral compass to act responsibly in protecting all nations; whether they like it or not, the refugees from the countries that are decimated by climate events will eventually wash-up on their shores.

Our climate challenges today, will be their migrant problem tomorrow.

Fortunately, the internally displaced persons that resulted from the hurricanes in 2017 and 2019 in the Caribbean, were cared for mostly within our region.

This will not always be the case. As the impact of climate change becomes more widespread, displaced persons will rush to developed countries for refuge.

With the best will in the world, generosity is constrained by capacity, and compassion is tempered by reality.

Therefore, we cannot rely on the goodwill and random acts of charity of others to care for our displaced populations.

We must fight relentlessly to put pressure the large emitters to reduce emissions and for compensation for the socio-economic and environmental damage they have inflicted on our countries.

Excellencies,

While we have made marginal progress, the current global frameworks, remain either largely unresponsive to climate change, or wholly insufficient in addressing the crisis.

Climate change threatens years of development progress and places in jeopardy our achievement of the sustainable development goals.

As a global community, we cannot sit idly and allow this to happen.

The issues of climate justice and climate reparations must be addressed in all fora, to correct the global injustices committed against SIDS and their peoples.

A united front must be launched against the changing climate in order to protect our planet, all of humanity and the gains we have made over several centuries.

For our part, Antigua and Barbuda has embarked on strategies to build alliances with the willing, to counter the threats we face from the impacts of climate change.

One of these initiatives which is currently taking place, was initiated two years ago in the margins of COP 26 in Glasgow by the Prime Minister of Tuvalu, Kausea Natano, and myself.

Recognizing the failure of others to act decisively; Prime Minister Natano and I, decided that we would seek an Advisory Opinion from the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea (ITLOS).

This opinion concerns the obligation of states to combat pollution linked to climate change and its ensuing marine repercussions, such as rising ocean temperatures, sea-level rise, and ocean acidification.

Joined by other small island states, we co-founded the Commission of Small Island States on Climate Change and International Law (COSIS).

COSIS sought and received a favorable agreement by ITLOS to hear our pleadings last September.

We went to ITLOS, because it is the guardian of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea.

It is the natural venue to seek legal clarity on the obligations of states, to protect our marine environment and by extension, protect our environment and all of humanity.

SIDS depend on the ocean not just for sustenance, but as a crucial part of our heritage, our identity and our economy.

Therefore, we cannot sit idly, while our countries sink beneath our feet, forcing us to flee our lands.

We must continue to fight for our survival

Pursuing this case through ITLOS is not an initiative just for the survival of SIDS.

It is a vital effort for the preservation and prosperity of all nations.

This is a duty of care that we exercise on behalf of the peoples of the world.

Excellencies,

I am all too aware, that responding to the effects of climate change comes with a price.

Developing nations, in-particular, small states like Antigua and Barbuda, lack the financial resources to adapt and mitigate against climate change.

Our challenges become even more daunting, with an unresponsive international financial architecture, that fails to prioritize concessional funding to assist SIDS to rebuild in the aftermath of these climate related incidents or shocks.

Consequently, SIDS have had to borrow repeatedly to repair damaged infrastructure and restore economic losses. We do this repeatedly to keep our countries viable and to avert the possibility of our people becoming climate migrants, or refugees.

SIDS suffer the greatest financial burden to climate change on a per capita basis, despite the fact that they contribute the least CO2 emissions globally – a mere 0.5%.

They are the greatest victims, not only because of unattended loss and damage to lives and livelihoods, but also because of the very existence of these countries is fatally endangered.

Why should citizens and residents of large polluting countries live in luxury while our peoples live in climate misery?

I have a particular objective at COP28, to focus on the Loss and Damage Fund – a Fund that I championed during Antigua and Barbuda's Chairmanship of AOSIS last year.

At COP27, the world's greatest polluters agreed that such a fund was important and decided to establish a transitional committee to make recommendations for consideration at COP28.

As we approach COP28, we must insist that the loss and damage fund be made operational without any further delays.

The fund must provide adequate financing to help SIDS withstand the seas as they rise, the winds as they increase in strength; and resources to rebuild when all our efforts to build resilience against climatic events fail.

However, I remind us all that our ultimate priority is the urgent reduction in emissions and the acceleration to renewables.

After COP28, the world will turn its attention towards Antigua and Barbuda, as we host the Fourth International Conference on SIDS in May 2024.

At SIDS4, we will continue to lead on climate issues, because tackling climate change provides an opportunity to consolidate and accelerate development gains, through cleaner air, improved public health and greater security for all.

We have no excuse not to act and we collectively must act now.

We have all the tools to answer the challenges posed by climate change, environmental pressures and biodiversity loss.

But tools are of no use if we don't use them. What is missing is the commitment to act and to act now

I congratulate the International Organization for Migration for spearheading dialogues on human mobility and climate change; I beseech you to turn these dialogues into action.

We need action, increased ambition and political will.

That's right ! more action, more ambition and more political will failing which, the world will have to contend with a proliferation of climate migrants and climate refugees in the near future and their attendant mobility.

I Thank You.