



Minister of Environment and Energy H.E Thoriq Ibrahim

Excellencies, Colleagues,

At the outset, let me thank UN DESA and OHRLLS for convening this event, which comes as we still continue to assess the damage wrought by Hurricane Irma just a few weeks ago. And Hurricane Maria just few days ago. The images of total devastation that are coming out of the Caribbean are heartbreaking and our thoughts and prayers go out to the members of our island family who have lost loved ones and property and who have such a difficult road ahead of them.

I would also like to acknowledge the presence of the distinguished speakers and participants at this event. These events provide an important opportunity to raise awareness and promote understanding amongst ourselves.

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Indeed, it is an ideal time to be discussing the relationship between the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda. Ensuring a coherent, coordinated, and universal implementation of these frameworks will be critical to managing the new realities of life in a warming world and mitigating the damage from storms like Irma and so many other impacts that SIDS and other communities around the world are dealing with today.

But lest we forget that even as the world responds to this climate change fueled tragedy, other islands are still rebuilding from the record storms that struck last year. Cyclone Winston, the strongest storm to make landfall in the Southern Hemisphere, killed 44 people in Fiji and wiped out decades of development progress in a matter of hours. Hurricane Matthew, which hit Haiti in October 2016, killed 1,000 people and destroyed 90 percent of structures in the affected areas, posing another tragic setback to the country as it was still recovering from a cholera epidemic.

The aftermath of these storms reminds us that climate change is truly a matter of life and death. Barbuda is uninhabitable in the wake of Hurricane Irma. We all know the consequences of changing weather patterns and natural disasters; yet we need to take coordinated steps to prevent future damages, especially injuries and fatalities. There needs to action based on an understanding for the linkages between short-term humanitarian crisis management, long-term mitigation and adaptation strategies, and disaster risk reduction.

But as imposing as the challenge seems, we should be encouraged by the its solutions are more affordable than ever before. Not only do they promise to reduce the danger of climate change, but also usher in a new era of prosperity for people in developed and developing countries alike.

In fact, climate change and sustainable development action are so interlinked we have come to say that we cannot tackle climate change without sustainable development and cannot achieve sustainable development if we do not tackle climate change.

This synergy is perhaps most evident in the energy sector: Economies need electricity to grow, but when it is generated from burning fossil fuels, the resulting emissions serve to worsen the crisis.

During the climate change and SDG negotiations, parties were careful to ensure that they weren't working at cross-purposes. The Paris Agreement explicitly mentions that limiting emissions has to be accomplished in light of the need for many countries to develop their economies and eradicate poverty. Similarly, the SDGs recognise the threat climate change poses to reaching those objectives.

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At the international level, we must continue to ensure cooperation as we mobilise the resources necessary for implementation and work to achieve both sets of goals. Just as importantly, the governments responsible for deploying climate and development projects on the ground must open lines of communication between bodies that in the past may have operated in distinct bureaucratic silos. This is why we have conceived of the 2030 Agenda as indivisible and we must ensure that we do not end up inadvertently dividing the 2030 Agenda by favouring funding support for particular SDGs over others.

A good example at the national level is the need for finance ministers to collaborate with energy ministries and local governments alike to ensure cohesion between emissions reduction plans and sustainable development goals.

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Turning to the Paris Agreement and the upcoming COP in Bonn, to be presided over by the distinguished Prime Minister of Fiji. Given the recent clear political intention of the Administration of the world's greatest historical emitter regarding the Paris Agreement, it is critical for this COP to demonstrate the rest of the world's continued commitment to the implementation of the Paris Agreement. It is only through our continued solidarity and spirit of consensus building that we can ensure that the Paris Agreement endures.

In addition to demonstrating our political commitment to the Paris Agreement, this COP will be significant because it will be the first time that a COP is presided over by a small island. As this is the “SIDS COP” I welcome the island focus and have every confidence that Fiji will be successful in guiding us to a strong set of decisions in Bonn.

Lastly, let me mention that given the recent devastation of Hurricane Irma, we will, be pushing for stronger action at attention on adaptation, resilience building and loss and damage at this COP and we are confident that we have the Fijian Presidency’s full support in this regard.

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The Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda represent the United Nations at its best—how the entire world can come together to tackle complex challenges. But it is now up to us to make sure these frameworks translate into effective and efficient action. Otherwise they will be remembered not as historic achievements but as tragic missed opportunities.

Thank you.