**ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES (ACS)**

**23RD ORDINARY MEETING OF THE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL OF THE ACS**

**Margarita Island, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, 16th March 2018**

**DECLARATION ON THE IMPACT OF DISASTERS**

**IN THE GREATER CARIBBEAN REGION**

We, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Heads of Delegations of the Member States and Associate Members of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), meeting on Margarita Island, Venezuela, on March 16, 2018, to convene the 23rd Ordinary Meeting of the Ministerial Council of our Association with the commitment to continue strengthening the ACS, especially in lightof the challenges posed by the impact of disasters in the Caribbean Region;

**Express our deep concern** over the increased frequency and intensity of disasters and their effects, which have resulted in the loss of countless human lives and which have adverse long-term social, economic and environmental consequences on efforts in advancing sustainable development, particularly in developing countries;

**Cognisant**of the growing challenges being experienced by Member States in disaster preparedness and response mechanisms as a result of the combined effect of the global economic and financial crises, unsustainable production and consumption patterns, as well as the increased frequency and intensity of disasters in the Caribbean region associated with climate change;

**Emphasising**that effective disaster risk reduction, and in particular, including reducing vulnerability to natural disasters, as well as the strengthening of capabilities to deal with this phenomena, require a multisectoral approach in order to achieve sustainable development;

**Recognising** the correlation between sustainable development, disaster risk reduction, disaster response and post-disaster recovery, as well as the need to continue efforts to build resilience in all these areas;

**Reaffirming** the full validity and applicability to the disasters ambit, in accordance with resolution 46/182 approved by United Nation General Assembly;

**Also recognising the urgent need** to continue developing and utilising the scientific and technical knowledge and expertise existing in its Member States so as to increase resilience to natural disasters;

**Highlighting** the importance of Caribbean countries having access to adequate, advanced, environmentally sound, cost-effective and user-friendly technologies in order to find appropriate solutions for disaster reduction and to strengthen efficiency and effectiveness with which disasters are managed;

**Considering** the efforts undertaken by the General Secretariat of the Association of Caribbean States, through the Directorate of Disaster Risk Reduction, to provide support to Member States and Associate Members through the execution of programmes and projects aimed at strengthening capabilities to address the challenges of natural disasters in the region;

**Recalling** that the Third Summit of Heads of State and/or Government of the ACS established in the Declaration of Margarita, the commitment to create the Greater Caribbean Zone of Cooperation in order to implement joint actions in the priority areas of the ACS such as Disasters;

**Bearing in mind** that paragraph 33 of the Declaration of Margarita recommended that Member States and Associate Members consider the possibility of creating National Post-Disaster Funds that would respond to the financing needs in the areas of rehabilitation, reconstruction and disaster risk mitigation;

**Also recalling** that the Fourth Summit of Heads of State/Government of the ACS reflected in the Declaration of Panama, recognised the common vulnerabilities of our countries and territories to disasters and their negative impact on the efforts aimed at aimed at achieving sustainable development, emphasising that the best way to combat these vulnerabilities to incorporate disaster management and risk reduction into development policies and plans at all levels;

**Further recalling** that the Declaration of Panama also reaffirmed the importance of international cooperation, particularly within the region, aimed at supporting the national and regional entities dedicated to disaster reduction; and recalling also that increased international cooperation toward developing countries is one of the goals of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030;

**Reiterating** the importance of revitalising the content of the Plan of Action adopted by the ACS High Level Conference on Disaster Reduction held in Saint-Marc, Republic of Haiti, from November 1416, 2007;

**Recalling** that the Plan of Action of Pétion Ville adopted by the 5th Summit of Heads of State and/or Government of the ACS channelled its work toward strengthening international cooperation and training in the areas of ​​disaster risk reduction, improved delivery of humanitarian assistance in all stages of a disaster and the promotion of a culture of prevention and early warning systems;

**Recalling** **also** that the Plan of Action of Pétion Ville established the Plan to Reduce Vulnerability to Disasters in order to contribute to the development of a plan to reduce vulnerability to disasters associated with natural hazards based on the Plan of Action of Saint Marc, the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, as well as other instruments related to this issue that are recognised and applied by the Member States of the ACS;

**Reaffirming** that the Plan of Action of Havana adopted at the 7th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the ACS established that, in light of the high exposure and current vulnerability of our countries to *disasters associated with natural hazards* and after careful examination of international agreements in this area, such as the Sendai Framework for Action for disaster risk reduction focussed on the promotion of Sustainable Development; it would guide its work toward evaluating and identifying disaster risks through geospatial systems, the implementation of spatial data infrastructure and modelling tools during the period;

**Declare the following:**

1. **We underscore** the global importance of the Greater Caribbean, a region that encompasses almost half of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean and which represents fifty-five percent of its total trade. Therefore, we reiterate that the permanence of the Association of Caribbean States as a privileged space for consultation, cooperation and concerted action in furtherance of Latin American and Caribbean unity. In this regard, we highlight the importance of the Caribbean Sea as our common and unifying patrimony and acknowledge the historic importance of the decision of the United Nations regarding the long term strategy of the ACS to have the Caribbean Sea recognised, at the international level, as a “Special Zone” in the context of sustainable development.
2. **We recognise** the high vulnerability of the region to the serious effects of climate change and its negative consequences on our peoples, particularly the elderly, women, children, persons with disabilities, our economies, infrastructure, biodiversity, endemic and highly vulnerable species and fragile ecosystems, such as coral reefs, especially those of Small Island Developing States, mountainous zones, countries with low-lying coastal zones and the Central American isthmus.
3. **We express** our condolences and solidarity to the people and communities affected by disasters, especially those who suffered the impact of hurricanes Irma, José and Maria and the earthquakes that occurred in Mexico and Guatemala in September 2017.
4. **We reiterate** our decision to direct our efforts towards the pursuitand consolidation of mechanisms and actions to increase awareness, enhance the exchange of information and sharing of best practices that would reduce disaster- induced loss of life as well as other socio- economic and environmental impact in the Caribbean, and we are fully aware of the importance of cooperation, solidarity and international alliances to address these phenomena.
5. **We express** our appreciation for the efforts undertaken by Governments and local communities to respond to and overcome the tragedies that affected the Greater Caribbean in 2017. In this regard, it is important to highlight the solidarity expressed and assistance given by the Member States, Associate and Observer Members of the ACS towards each other, both at the bilateral level and within the context of their various sub-regional configurations, including CARICOM and the OECS.
6. **Recognizing** the efforts of the SG, as well as the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as the President of the Ministerial Council for the period 2017-2018, and other Members States in coordinating and assisting in the relief efforts in response to the disasters that occurred within the region during in the last third of 2017.
7. **We reaffirm our commitment** to increase our efforts to strengthen cooperation within the framework of the ACS and with other international organisations and agencies through, among others, the ACS Programme to Counter Climate Change in the Greater Caribbean 2016-2018; to implement actions to reduce current and future vulnerability of our populations, ecosystems and economic sectors to climate change; with a view to advancing the adaptation process, including the implementation of comprehensive programmes and projects to strengthen our resilience and foster greater adaptation and mitigation.
8. **We request** that the General Secretariat prepare a proposal that would continue, expand and enhance the ACS Programme to counter Climate Change in the Greater Caribbean 2016-2018, so that Member States may have a practical and effective regional instrument to deal with this nefarious phenomenon. The proposal will be presented at the 24th Meeting of the Ministerial Council in 2019 to be considered for approval.
9. **We highlight** the importance of the Paris Agreement and its accompanying resolution, whose implementation, guided by the principles of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, must strengthen the international framework to address climate change with ambitious mitigation action.
10. **In this regard, we underscore** the urgency of taking action prior to 2020, including through the effective and adequate provision of financial resources, technologies and implementation resources for developing countries 193 countries have signed the COP21 Paris Climate Summit, and 171 have ratified it.
11. **We insist** on the need to respect the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, according to the respective capabilities of each State, keeping in mind the principles established in Paris Agreement.
12. **We also urge that** developed countries, as part of a global effort, continue to take the lead in mobilising climate finance in accordance with their existing obligations under the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement, and that they facilitate technology transfer and capacity building in developing countries, including the Official Development Assistance contributions.
13. **We urge** all countries signatory to the Paris Agreement to comply with their provisions and to continue to address the problem of climate change from a holistic and functional perspective that facilitates dialogue, concerted action and cooperation in the application of effective measures that reduce, among other factors, the emission of greenhouse gases which cause powerful and dangerous meteorological phenomena in the inter-tropical area such as hurricanes and typhoons.
14. **We recognise** that the Member States of the Association of Caribbean States have gained experience and expertise in disaster prevention and management by implementing various international commitments such as the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction and the subsequent International Strategy for Disaster Reduction; the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World; the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. However, we express our deep concern over the excessive loss of irreplaceable human lives and valuable assets and the grave personal injuries and large displacements being suffered by Caribbean communities as a result of various disasters.
15. **In that regard, we welcome** the results of the 5th Session of the 2017 Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction held in Cancun, Mexico, in May 2017, and we take note of the Cancun High-Level Communiqué.
16. **We are convinced** that disasters continue to pose a significant threat to the survival, dignity, livelihood and security of the peoples and communities of the Caribbean, particularly the poor. Therefore, it is imperative to increase the capacity of the countries which are most prone to disasters, especially the least developed countries and the Small Island States, in order to reduce the effects of disasters by increasing national efforts and intensifying bilateral, regional and international cooperation, mainly through technical and financial assistance.
17. **We underscore** the importance of strengthening cooperation and interaction among Member States and different stakeholders in order to promote voluntary partnerships for disaster management. We are also determined to continue creating mechanisms for the exchange of information on programmes, initiatives, best practices, lessons learnt and technologies in supporting the reduction of the impact of disasters, so that Caribbean countries could share the results and fruits of those efforts.
18. **We express** our conviction that disasters significantly reduce the results of investments made in development and therefore continue to be a major obstacle to sustainable development and poverty eradication. We are aware that investments in development do not take disaster risks into due account, as a result of which they can increase vulnerabilities to such phenomena and weaken response capabilities.
19. **We encourage** Member States to undertake efforts to establish and improve building codes that would help ACS member countries to ensure that public and private facilities are more resilient to the effects of disasters.
20. **We express** our support for the encouragement and enhancement, and land-use planning, anticipating that enables relocation of communities away from disaster-prone areas.
21. **We encourage** the development of disaster relief strategies, including adequate financial and investment mechanisms, which would enable ACS Member States to address the post-disaster needs of the most vulnerable groups and those of and those related to public infrastructure.
22. **We propose** to continue with the implementation of initiatives that would help Member States to establish national pre- and post-disaster funds to support disaster prevention, response and recovery efforts to effectively deliver relief assistance to victims of disaster and in the re-building and reconstruction efforts without risk reproduction.
23. **We are determined** to promote the mobilisation of resources from the international donor community for the creation of a regional fund to finance activities focussing on disaster management andclimate change adaptation.
24. **We request** the General Secretariat, on the basis of this Declaration, to direct its efforts toward promoting the provision of financial resources by state and international donor entities, through the Special Fund, in order to contribute to the execution of projects that would allow for disaster relief.
25. **Lastly, we request** the Secretariat to disseminate the content of the Declaration widely among the Member States, Associate and Observer Members of the ACS, as well as among all Governments, United Nations Agencies, Intergovernmental Organisations, the Business Sector, Non-Governmental Organisations and society in general, in order to reaffirm our commitment to the search for permanent solutions to the factors that increase the frequency, intensity and impact of disasters on the Greater Caribbean region.