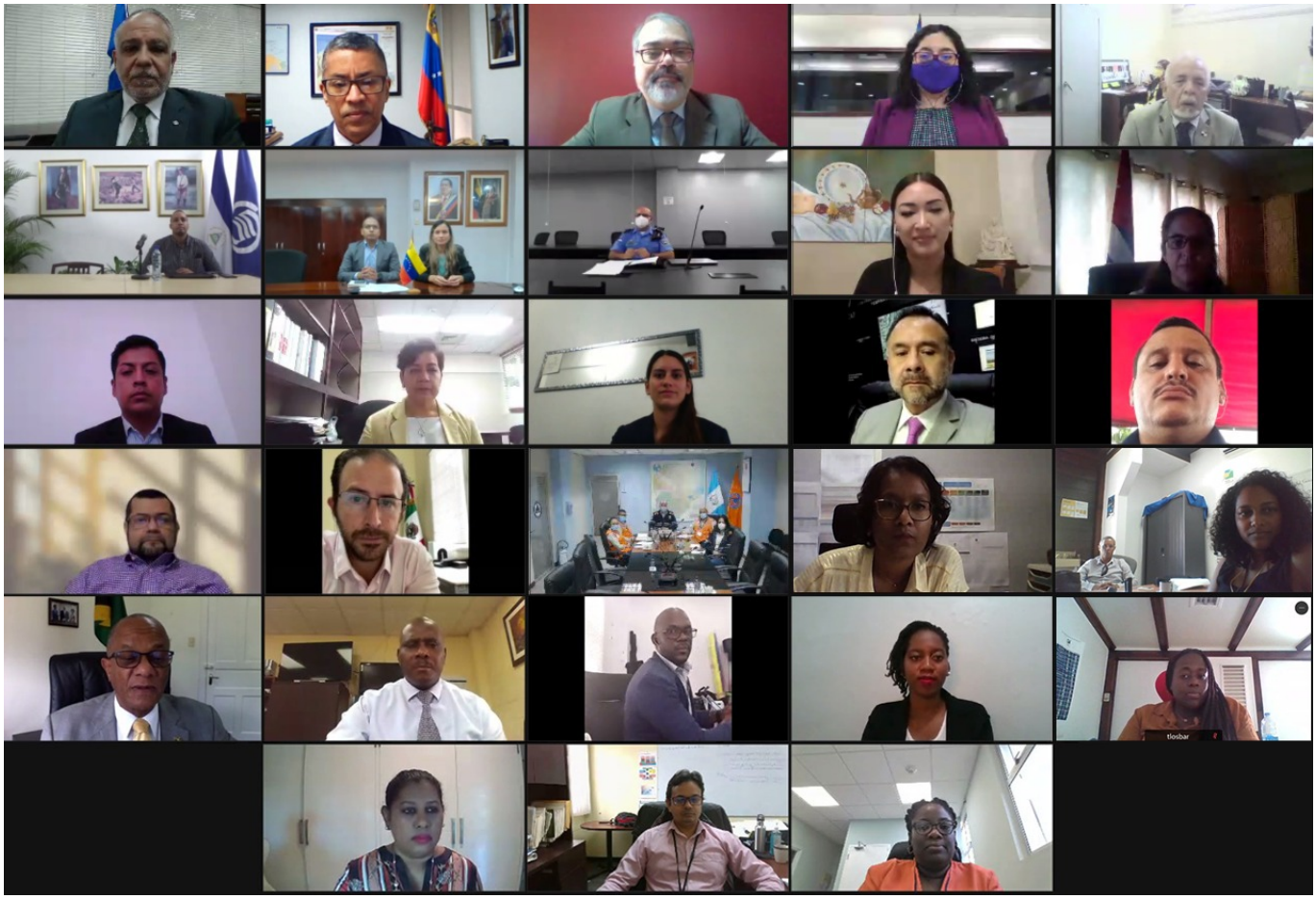
Remarks by the Secretary General at the Special Committee Meeting on Disaster Risk Reduction



• His Excellency Ambassador Arthur Williams, High Commissioner of Jamaica in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and Chairman of the Special Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction

• Members of the Board of Directors of the Special Committee for Disaster Risk Reduction

• Ambassadors of the Member States and Associate Members of the ACS,

• Distinguished representatives of our partners, Special guests ladies and gentlemen,

Good Morning. Welcome and welcome to the Twenty-ninth Meeting of the Special Committee for Disaster Risk Reduction, which for the second time is being held virtually, due to the pandemic caused by COVID-19.

It is an honor to participate in such an important meeting for the first time as Secretary General of this distinguished organization, a task that I assumed 8 months ago, during which I have observed a small sample of the impact of disasters in our region.

The recurring presence of natural phenomena, the already visible effects of climate change, coupled with the historically constructed vulnerability in different population groups, poor waste management, environmental degradation, little or in some cases no land use planning, among other factors. , make the Caribbean a region with a high risk of disasters.

Hurricanes, droughts, storms, earthquakes, and landslides have affected all of our countries. As the President of the Board of Directors has already pointed out, only 3 months ago the activity of the Le Soufriere volcano in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines increased significantly; However, the timely work of monitoring and alerting the population allowed a complicated mobilization to be carried out, thus safeguarding the lives of thousands of citizens right in a complex scenario due to the pandemic caused by COVID-19, which deserves recognition. , because it acted in a preventive way, checking the relevance of the Early Warning Systems.

We are currently in the middle of an active hurricane season. During the first days of July, Hurricane Elsa affected Barbados, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Jamaica and Haiti, which reminds us that tropical cyclones will be present in our region every year.

We can no longer characterize natural phenomena as black swans, that is, events of low probability and high impact. Hence, disaster risk reduction starts from a premise, and that is that we must know that natural phenomena are going to occur, possibly with increasing frequency, and with greater impact. Preparedness to reduce risks begins with early warnings, emergency plans, practice exercises, capacity and competency development, application of best practices, and design and use of new coding for housing construction, road infrastructure, bridges, protective barriers, and channeling of rivers and streams. All of this is part of the new order in which we live.

But additionally, we must now include topics such as pandemic disasters since the scientific community has indicated that it is very likely that we will live with this pandemic or its variations for many more years. This type of disaster also entails the application of alert protocols, adaptation of health systems, training, communication strategies, education of the population, etc. And it is important to note that we are in the era of disinformation in which the population gives more credibility to social networks than to official information from governmental and scientific sources.

All of this makes risk reduction more complicated because, to be effective, it requires the timely and efficient interaction of government and private entities, and the active participation of civil society.

More than 75% of current disasters are of hydrometeorological origin, that is, they are related to the presence or absence of water, which underpins that we must focus on increasing the sustainability and resilience of societies, to promote the sustainable development of the region.

That is why we consider that disaster risk reduction can promote early adaptation to climate change, as it becomes a strategy to adapt to current climate variability and extreme events, that is, risk reduction offers a way of address some of the economic, political, social, technological and institutional obstacles to realizing the full potential for adaptation.

Currently, we must carry out actions consistent with the situation we face around the world. We need to focus on more ambitious goals to mitigate and adapt this reality. For this, and as we have mentioned in various meetings, we do not have to reinvent the wheel. Let us seek to promote international technical cooperation, share good practices and start the machinery so that the actors join and work together in a safer and more resilient Caribbean in the face of disasters.

I call for all members of this association to participate and enrich our proposed Action Plan for 2022-2024 and, with this, we build a better future in this region. For my part, I will present a general strategic direction proposal related to Disaster Risk Reduction, so that they have information that allows us to have a broad, respectful and inclusive discussion.

We must reduce the loss of life in disasters, with tools such as early warning systems, preparedness and more efficient evacuations. All this is essential in our effort to alleviate human suffering and

reduce the number of people affected, considering that disasters do not differentiate sectors or social classes or borders.

Of course, a common problem requires collaboration, coordination, and concerted action. I take this moment to thank our partners and especially the presenters. We are excited to hear the presentations from the Institute for Research and Studies on Alerts and Risks, AC, the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Fund (CCRIF-SPC) and the Regional Humanitarian Assistance Logistics Center (CLRAH) of Panama and ARISE Mexico.

We can be forewarned and prepared. Our society may be diverse, but we are all human beings who share the Caribbean Sea as a precious common good. I invite you to participate to build a Work Program according to the paths that our countries face. Let's seize the opportunity to leave a better world for the next generations. Thank you