



STATEMENT BY

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PRIME MINISTER OF Antigua and Barbuda

AT THE MEETING OF GLOBAL HEADS OF

GOVERNMENT

AT THE UN CONFERENCE ON CLIMATE CHANGE

IN PARIS, FRANCE

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Mr. President, Colleague Heads of Government, Distinguished Delegates.

First, I repeat now what I said to President Hollande on November 13th.

The people and government of Antigua and Barbuda deplore and condemn the terrorist attacks on this country.

In our 21st Century world, which is inextricably interlinked, terrorism in all its forms must be halted by global action.

We stand in solidarity with France, particularly as its Caribbean border in Guadeloupe is just 30 miles from our own.

Mr President, terrorism is a major threat to our common humanity.

So, too is Climate Change.

It is arguably the greatest threat that now confronts all mankind.

It knows no borders and it respects neither size nor economic and military power; it cannot be turned back by immigration controls.

All of our countries are its potential victims.

But it poses the greatest threat to the smallest on our shared planet, particularly the island states in the Caribbean, the Pacific and the Indian Ocean.

The St Lucian Poet and Nobel Laureate, Derek Walcott put it succinctly when he warned that:

“... a morning could come in which governments might ask what happened not merely to the forests and the bays, but to a whole people”.

Refugees from climate change could become as much a problem for rich countries in the near future as are the refugees of war in the present.

That is one of the many reasons why this Conference would be wise to commit to a legally binding agreement that actually reduces carbon emissions from their dangerous levels.

It is also why this Conference should agree a compact that provides small developing countries with the means to finance mitigation and adaptation to Climate Change.

I need hardly remind this Conference of world leaders and climate change experts, that countries such as mine contribute less than 0.01% to harmful carbon emissions.

Yet, innocent though we are, we are the greatest victims.

I will not waste precious minutes to describe the damage that climate change is already doing to our countries, and what it will do in the future.

You all know the story very well.

In a sentence, all of small islands are facing catastrophe, and some are facing extinction through no fault of our own.

Therefore, we will judge the success or failure of this Conference by only two things:

the first, is the extent to which all countries bind themselves to implement measures limiting global warming to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius; and

the second, is the firm actions that the industrialized nations take to help us fund the measures we have to put in place to adapt to, and mitigate against, the calamitous effects of Climate Change.

No number of promises and pledges that are couched in guarded and reluctant language can now be acceptable.

The time for dithering and doubting; for rethinking and renegeing is past.

The urgency of action is now.

Mr President, my country is committed to implementing programmes for adaptation and mitigation.

We have drawn up the plans and we have submitted our Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) to this Conference.

So, I want it to be clear that we are determined to play our part.

Our difficulties are the following:

We are already burdened by debt incurred to rebuild time and again after destructive hurricanes.

We are weighed down with heavy commercial debt to produce water in long years of drought; and

We have no access to concessional financing from the International Financial Institutions.

Given this scenario, we have no fiscal space to finance new costs for adaptation and mitigation.

While our level of ambition in our INDC is high; we cannot deliver without international assistance.

Therefore, there must be easier criteria and procedures for small states to access climate funding.

Serious account has to be taken of the limited capacity of our countries and our special peculiarities.

Mr President, though we firmly believe that the industrialized nations have an obligation to our one Earth to provide grant financing to compensate for the damage they have done - and are doing - to our country, we are willing to offer creative and constructive ways as part of such financing.

For instance, we are ready to do the following:

Swap our debt for green energy; and

Subordinate long term loans and debt write-offs as possible instruments to finance adaptation efforts.

But, the governments of the industrialized nations must join us in the Paris Club to help us to pay off creditors and to ease us from these debts.

Unless, that is done small countries – mine and many others – will not be able to adapt to and mitigate against the damage being done to us by others.

Mr President, like terrorism, climate change is a war.

It is not a war of nation against nation; or of state against insurgents.

It is a war for all mankind and for human survival.

There can be no winners, only losers.

None of us can afford to leave Paris as losers.

Thank you.