

Hurricane Irma erased 'footprints of an entire civilization' on Barbuda, Prime Minister tells UN

21 September 2017 – The Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Gaston Alphonso Browne, told the United Nations General Assembly today that after the largest storm ever in the Atlantic Ocean, “the island of Barbuda is decimated; its entire population left homeless; and its buildings reduced to empty shells.”

As all its inhabitants were evacuated to Antigua in the wake of Hurricane Irma, in addition to providing shelter and basic necessities to the residents, the social services on Antigua are under great strain – providing places for 600 additional children; medical services for the elderly; and a means of income for the able-bodied.

“For the first time in over 300 years, there is now no permanent resident on Barbuda. The footprints of an entire civilization have been emasculated by the brutality and magnitude of Irma,” he said.

Mr. Browne stressed that Barbuda is not only a natural disaster, it is a humanitarian crisis that now consumes Antigua. “Whatever position on climate change any nation takes, the evidence of global warming is now irrefutably stronger,” he underscored. “We are the least of the polluters, but the largest of the casualties. The unfairness, injustice and inequality are painfully obvious,” he added.

He pointed out that according to preliminary estimates, rebuilding would cost Barbuda about \$250 million – representing 15 per cent or more of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP) of approximately \$1.5 billion. “Antigua and Barbuda urgently requires the assistance of the international community, including the international development and finance institutions, to accomplish this vital task of rebuilding Barbuda,” he said.

Caribbean islands need to construct more resilient buildings and infrastructure, requiring international developmental and financial institutions to provide financing at concessionary rates without artificial impediments – or cost in lives and property would be “too frightening to contemplate.”

[Full statement available here](#)