

UN chief urges global solidarity, accelerated climate action after visit to hurricane-stricken Barbuda

7 October 2017 – Having seen first-hand the destruction wrought by the recent hurricanes in the Caribbean, United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Saturday called for the full mobilization of the international community to support the people of the affected areas, while stressing the need to accelerate climate action.

“I have just witnessed a [level of devastation](#) that I have never seen in my life,” Mr. Guterres told a press conference following a visit to storm-battered Barbuda.

“I have been in areas torn by conflict. In my own country, I have seen earthquakes, I’ve seen storms [...] I have never seen such a high-level of devastation like the one that I witnessed in Barbuda,” he stated.

“This must make us think seriously,” added Mr. Guterres, who arrived today for a two-day visit to Antigua, Barbuda and Dominica to survey the damage and to assess what more the UN can do to help people recover from the [back-to-back, category 5 hurricanes](#) that struck the region recently.

The Secretary-General cited “a clear link” between the level of greenhouse gas in the atmosphere, including CO₂, the temperature of the water and the intensity of the rainstorms and of the different hurricanes in the region and in other parts of the world.

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Hurricane Irma, which struck the region in early September, had winds of 300 km per hour for 37 hours – the longest such period ever recorded.

“So the link between climate change and the devastation we are witnessing is clear, and there is a collective responsibility of the international community to stop this suicidal development,” stated Mr. Guterres.

“And for that, it is essential that the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change is fully endorsed and respected but also to recognize that the commitments made in Paris are not enough,” he said.

Mr. Guterres also stressed the need to mobilize resources, including through innovative financial mechanisms, so that people can rebuild their lives, noting that middle-income countries such as Antigua and Barbuda cannot do it alone.

“This is an obligation of the international community, because they are suffering the effects of climate change but they have not contributed to it.”

In Barbuda, the Secretary-General walked through Codrington town and met with some of the returnees. The island’s 1,600 residents were evacuated to Antigua before Hurricane Irma struck last month. In Antigua, many of the displaced are staying in shelters, while others with family and friends. Some residents have been traveling back to Barbuda to check on their homes and lands.

Since the disasters struck, the UN and partners have delivered relief by both air and the sea, reaching thousands across the region with food, water purification tablets, water storage tanks, tents, school kits, mosquito nets and cash assistance. They also launched a \$113.9 million appeal to cover humanitarian needs for the immediate period ahead. The UN family is also supporting those staying in the shelters.

Mr. Guterres had a chance to meet with some of the displaced during a visit to the National Technical Training Center in Antigua, which is currently sheltering 112 people, and even got a lesson from some of the younger residents in ‘warri’ – a game that was brought over to the region from Africa and is played with 48 seeds on a rectangular board with 12 receptacles or ‘houses.’

“The most immediate need they have right now is privacy,” Samantha Burnette, who manages the shelter at the Training Centre, told *UN News*. “Most of them are complaining that they have been bunking with a lot of people. So they don’t have the space they need.”

Most of the residents have made up their mind to stay out the year in Antigua. “Some of them are saying there’s nothing in Barbuda to go back to right now,” said Ms. Burnette. “They don’t mind going back but after it has been rebuilt. Some of them are willing to go back as it is now. But the majority are here and they don’t want to move and go nowhere. If they do go over, it’s just for the day and they come back.”

Despite the difficulties they have gone through, the residents have adjusted well to their new situation, Ms. Burnette said. “I really feel they have adjusted themselves well. You can see they are smiling a little more now.”