

DRAFT REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES (ACS)

**25th INTERSESSIONAL PREPARATORY MEETING FOR THE 28TH ORDINARY
MEETING OF THE ACS MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

ACS Secretariat, Port of Spain, Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

(Virtual Meeting)

18th January, 2023

REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Venezuela

In the Greater Caribbean, we live and operate in a multi-hazard environment. This was well exemplified between 2021 and 2022, when the region experienced simultaneous and cascading hazard events including tropical cyclones, floods, drought, volcanic activity and earthquakes, all amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. These events resulted in significant displacement, death, injury and material losses, and crippled already fragile regional economies.

Added to this, climate change poses a serious threat to human wellbeing in the region. According to the World Meteorological Organisation's 'State of the Climate in Latin America and the Caribbean 2021' report, the Greater Caribbean region is experiencing extreme weather and climate change that may cause irreversible damage and endanger lives and livelihoods. The recent devastation caused by the passage of Hurricanes Ian and Julia is a stark reminder of this.

This speaks to the need for comprehensive approaches to disaster risk management, which integrate disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. Emphasis must be placed on addressing the underlying drivers of risk such as poor early warning data infrastructure, insufficient disaster risk knowledge and limited capabilities for early warning and early action at the community level. Investments in effective "end-to end" and people-centered multi-hazard early warning systems are imperative towards to this end. Indeed, now more than ever before, we must take decisive action to safeguard the lives and livelihoods of the Caribbean people.

It is within this context that this report is written. It covers the changes, challenges and opportunities faced by the Directorate in implementing the projects and activities set out in Plan of Action 2022 to 2028 for the period June 2022 to November 2022. Furthermore, this report will also highlight the achievements and future plans of the Directorate and the Special Committee for Disaster Risk Reduction.

A) CHANGES IN THE DIRECTORATE

(I) Staff Changes

The directorate experienced staff changes in April, August and September 2022. On 25th April, Mrs. Cherisse Braithwaite-Joseph assumed the role of Advisor to the directorate. Mrs. Sharane Mohammed tendered her resignation as Administrative Assistant and demitted office on 25th August, 2022. This role was temporarily filled by Mrs. Gina Cabrera-Tilokee for the period 1st to 30th September. The recruitment process to full this role is currently ongoing.

In August, the directorate welcomed two interns from the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Segregated Portfolio Company (CCRIF SPC). Justyn Alexander commenced his internship on 2nd August and Jamala Alexander commenced on 18th August. Justyn Alexander completed his CCRIF SPC internship on 7th October and will continue to work as an ACS intern for the period 10th October to 16th December. Jamala Alexander will complete her CCRIF SPC internship on 26th October and will continue to work as an ACS intern for the period 27th October to 16th December.

B) CHALLENGES

(I) Limited Resources

The current staff members of the directorate are the Director, Advisor, Two Research Assistants, and a Project Assistant, contracted for the Sandy Shorelines project. Moreover, with the absence of an Administrative Assistant, the directorate is operating below full capacity.

At the same time, interests in the areas of Disaster Risk Reduction and the Environment continue to increase due to heightened global concern for climate change and other risk-related issues. As such the directorate continues to receive invitations to participate in various regional and international projects and initiatives.

In this context, the directorate is seeking to maximise its limited resources to execute ongoing projects and activities that respond to recurrent natural hazards, while establishing strategic partnerships that are relevant to, and address, current and future risk issues.

C) ACHIEVEMENTS

(I) Statutory Meetings

1st Meeting of the Executive Board of the SCDRR

In April 2022, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela was elected chair of the Special Committee for Disaster Risk Reduction (SCDRR). The Executive Board is chaired by His Excellency Álvaro Enrique Sánchez Cordero, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The other members of the board are Vice Chairs- Major General (Retired) Rodney Smart, Executive Director of the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management of Trinidad and Tobago and Ms. Rosa Otero, Director of International Relations of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources, Dominican Republic and Rapporteur, His Excellency Víctor Hugo Morales Meléndez, Permanent Representative of Mexico to the ACS.

The Executive Board held its first meeting on 1st July, 2022. The meeting served to familiarise the new board members with their important role and function. Director Ana Leticia Ramírez Cuevas presented the past and present work of the Directorate, and the strategic objectives and goals of the ACS Action Plan 2022-2028. The Chair called for urgent collaboration and joint efforts for the benefit of the populations of all ACS Member States and the Board members shared their goals and visions for the coming year.

30th Meeting of the SCDRR

The 30th meeting of the SCDRR was successfully executed on 5th September, 2022. Participants provided feedback on the ACS Plan of Action 2022 to 2028, the Implementation Plan 2022 to 2028 and the DECS work programme 2022 to 2023. Participants also provided input on three project concept documents focused on multi-hazard early warning systems, geospatial information systems and capacity building for disaster response. These projects are proposed for presentation at the 6th International Cooperation Conference of the ACS.

The meeting resolved that participants would be given the opportunity to submit further comments on the project concept documents via official correspondence to the ACS Secretariat. Participants also committed to work towards the adoption of a dynamic implementation plan, which builds regional resilience and strengthens multilateral cooperation in accordance with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

(II) International Days

World Humanitarian Day- This day was observed on 19th August, 2022, under the theme, "It Takes a Village". The DECS commemorated this day by posting a media brief on the ACS social media platforms, which highlighted and celebrated the important role that humanitarian workers play in crisis response.

World Meteorological Day- This was commemorated on 23rd March, 2022. The DECS observed this day by publishing a media brief on the ACS' social media platforms highlighting the importance of hydrometeorological and climate information for disaster risk reduction. The Directorate also participated in the official commemoration day ceremony hosted by the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO). During the Ceremony, United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres announced that the WMO will lead a global effort to ensure that all people have access to early warning systems within the next five years. The DECS has established contact with WMO Representative for North America, Central America and the Caribbean, Mr. Rodney Martínez Güingla and other regional stakeholders in order to join this effort.

International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction: October 13. This year, DECS commemorated this important day by organising a Webinar on Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems.

World Tsunami Awareness Day- This was commemorated on 5th November, 2022. The DECS observed this day by posting an article on the ACS website, highlighting the importance of public education and preparedness on tsunami risk.

(III) Promoting the strengthening and integration of comprehensive disaster risk systems and climate change adaptation in development planning- Paragraph B.1 of the ACS Plan of Action 2022-2028.

The directorate has continued its commitment to the strengthening and integration of comprehensive disaster risk systems and climate change adaptation in development planning. Conducting assessments of institutional capacities to manage disaster risk within the region is a critical part of this process.

UNDRR-ACS Regional Multi-Hazard Early Warning System (MHEWS) Report

The directorate is currently working on a joint report with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction which evaluates capacities for MHEWS in the Caribbean region. The study provides an updated assessment of the status of MHEWS for all Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) Participating States. It highlights existing gaps and capacities in the areas of governance, disaster risk knowledge, forecasting, monitoring and detection, warning and dissemination and response capability. It also looks specifically at early warning capacities for geological, hydro-meteorological, environmental, biological, chemical, and technological hazards at the country level and makes recommendations for addressing the gaps in regional MHEWS. The DECS Advisor participated in the presentation of the report at the 5th Meeting of the Regional Early Warning Systems (EWS) Consortium from September 1-2, 2022 in Barbados. The report received positive feedback and the comments are currently being reviewed.

UNDRR Regional Assessment Report 2023

The DECS is also participating in the production of the UNDRR Regional Assessment Report 2023 (RAR2023). This report follows the RAR2021 and seeks to generate an understanding of disaster risk reduction as an essential component of development planning. The Director is a member of the Intergovernmental Regional Committee for the report. As such, she has had the opportunity to contribute to its strategic focus and content. The report is expected to provide relevant information for governments and other stakeholders to facilitate evidence-based decision making.

(IV) Promote the strengthening of disaster response capacities, resilience and safety culture in the region-Paragraph B.2 of the ACS Plan of Action 2022-2028.

The directorate has also continued its commitment to strengthen disaster response capacities, resilience and a safety culture in the Greater Caribbean. One of the ways in which this is being achieved is through capacity building initiatives in partnership with regional and international stakeholders.

Webinar on Multi-hazard Early Warning Systems

On 11 October, 2022, the directorate hosted a webinar in collaboration with The Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA), the Kyoto University, the

Office for Disaster Preparedness and Management of Trinidad and Tobago (ODPM TT), the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction Regional Office for the Americas and the Caribbean (UNDRR ROAMC), the Caribbean Meteorological Organisation (CMO) and CADENA.

The webinar was held in anticipation of International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction, which is commemorated annually on October 13, 2022. It was held under the theme “Investing in Multi-hazard Early Warning Systems to Empower those Most at Risk” and its objective was “to highlight challenges, lessons learnt and best practices in the implementation of MHEWS in the Greater Caribbean and identify opportunities to improve and increase access to them”. The webinar featured presentations from regional and international experts who discussed the status of multi-hazard early warning systems in various contexts, as well as best practices and lessons learned. It was attended by 96 persons, including representatives from national governments, intergovernmental organisations, national disaster management agencies, academia and civil society groups.

The Directorate was successful in engaging a wide audience, who expressed appreciation for the information discussed. As a result of this initiative, the directorate has strengthened partnerships with regional and international disaster risk management experts and has also expanded its contact database.

Workshop on Risk Management Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid

The Director of the DECS attended the Workshop on Risk Management Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid, held within the Framework Partnership Agreement for Copernicus Users Uptake (FPCUP). This was held from 27th to 28th October in Panama and its objective was to facilitate a discussion with stakeholders of Copernicus, The Earth Observation Programme of the European Union, in order to improve and facilitate dialog between all national end users and enterprise community members’ representatives. The event focused on potential products for public authorities to manage extreme weather and climatic conditions and is expected to facilitate the identification and design of downstream platform and services, built upon suitable and sound user requirements. The directorate considers this an excellent learning exercise.

(V) Promote the strengthening of preparedness for effective response in the face of disasters in the Greater Caribbean region, Paragraph B.3 of the ACS Plan of Action 2022-2028

The directorate is also engaging in activities to promote the strengthening of preparedness for effective response in the face of disasters in the Greater Caribbean region.

5th Meeting of the Regional Early Warning Consortium

The 5th Meeting of the Regional Early Warning Consortium was held on September 1-2, 2022 in Bridgetown, Barbados. It was hosted by CDEMA and the UNDRR with the purpose of developing a strategic and advisory body for the advancement and strengthening of Early Warning Systems within the Caribbean Region. The DECS Advisor attended the meetings and delivered a presentation on the DECS' early warning systems initiatives.

4th Regional Dialogue Platform in Latin America and the Caribbean on Anticipatory Action

The 4th Regional Dialogue Platform in Latin America and the Caribbean on Anticipatory Action was held from 28-29 September, 2022 in Antigua Guatemala. It was hosted by the Anticipation Hub in collaboration with the German Red Cross and the World Food Programme. The platform provided an opportunity for disaster risk management actors to share progress, new initiatives, and work towards a joint agenda for Anticipatory Action in the Americas. The Disaster Risk Reduction Research Assistant, Ms. Christal Benjamin attended this conference and highlighted the ACS' ongoing work to strengthen regional early warning systems. Coming out of this conference, the DECS has established new partnerships and has strengthened existing partnerships with regional organisations focused on anticipatory action.

Regional Consultation on Integrating Private Sector on Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems' Governance and Actions

The Regional Office for the Americas and the Caribbean of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and the network of Caribbean Chambers of Commerce (CARICHAM) will host a regional consultation on "Integrating Private Sector on Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems' Governance and Actions" in the city of Saint George's, Grenada from 22nd to 23rd November, 2022. The objective of this consultation is promote and support collaboration among relevant public and private stakeholders to strengthen the resilience of business to disasters, while contributing to the advancement of MHEWS in the Caribbean region. Attendees will include Chambers of Industry and Commerce, Regional and National Disaster Risk Management Offices, and Meteorological Agencies in the Caribbean region. The Director of the DECS will attend the event and contribute to the consultation process.

D) FUTURE PLANS

In the ensuing period, the directorate will seek funding and partnerships for three projects focused on multi-hazard early warning systems, geospatial information systems and capacity building for disaster response focused on people from vulnerable groups. The directorate will also continue to collaborate with regional and international partners to build capacity for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaption in the region.

- (I) Strengthening Capacities for Multi-hazard Early Warning Systems in the Greater Caribbean Region (MH-EWS)**-The objective of this project is to increase access to multi-hazard early warning systems across the Greater Caribbean through the installation of 150 Multi-Alert Diffusion Towers and the strengthening of community capacities to use these systems, in order to increase local disaster preparedness and response.
- (II) Geospatial Information System of the Greater Caribbean for Disaster Prevention (GIS-GC)**- The objective of this project is to provide the countries of the Greater Caribbean with a geospatial information platform that integrates and upgrades existing data and layers, in order to increase the capacity for prevention and response to disasters caused by natural phenomena, in order to generate positive impact on public policy planning and decision-making in the region, through comprehensive risk management as a cross-cutting axis of sustainable development.
- (III) Greater Caribbean Bridges to Inclusion Project (GC BTI)** - The objective of this project is to create a circular economy by helping underserved populations secure career opportunities created from disaster recovery, infrastructure building, and tourism within each ACS Member State. GC BTI will establish training centres in all 25 Member States and 10 Associate Members that will provide free training to underserved populations on the areas of skilled trades (construction, electrical, carpentry, plumbing, HVAC), skilled trade assistant, and tourism worker (food service, maintenance, housekeeping). Individuals from underserved communities will gain necessary skills to support infrastructure building, disaster recovery, and tourism growth
- (IV) Capacity Building Events** - the Directorate will seek to host at least one event with new partners specialised in biological health risks

targeted at disaster risk management organisations within Member States.

Conclusion

As Chair, Venezuela remains committed to ensuring that the Directorate's plans and activities are implemented despite the various challenges it faces. Venezuela will also contribute to the implementation of a strategic implementation plan that addresses the root causes of disasters and integrates mitigation and adaptation to achieve sustainable development. The successful execution of the implementation plan depends on the cooperation and concerted action of all ACS countries, Founding Observers, Observers, Social Actors and International Cooperation partners. Venezuela looks forward to working with ACS Member States and Associate Member States to enhance the resilience of the peoples of the Caribbean and ensure a more resilient and sustainable future for all.