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**Welcome Remarks by OAS Assistant Secretary General**

**Ambassador Nestor Mendez**

**Meeting of the Inter-American Committee on Natural Disaster Reduction (IACNDR)**

**June 23, 2022**

**Virtual-3:00 pm**

* H.E. Elizabeth Darius-Clarke, Chair of the Permanent Council and Permanent Representative of Saint Lucia to the OAS;
* H.E. Anthony Phillips-Spencer, Chair of the Committee on Hemispheric Security and Permanent Representative of Trinidad and Tobago to the OAS;
* Distinguished Regional Coordinators;
* Members of the Inter-American Committee on Natural Disaster Reduction (IACNDR);
* Permanent Observers to the OAS

Good afternoon

I wish to extend a warm welcome to the members of the Inter-American Committee on Natural Disaster Reduction (IACNDR) and to the delegates from Member States and Permanent Observers that have joined us this afternoon.

I am pleased that we have convened today, not in response to a natural disaster crisis in the Hemisphere. Rather, today’s meeting is intended to provide us with a valuable opportunity to renew our commitment to work together and, continue discussions on strengthening relevant response mechanisms, and assess established capacity in our region. This, all in an effort to ensure a coordinated response to natural disasters, particularly as we have already entered the 2022 Atlantic Hurricane Season, which extends from June 1 to November 30.

In its annual seasonal outlook, the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has recently forecast another above-average hurricane season, projecting 14 to 21 named storms, and 3 to 6 major hurricanes, rated Category 3 or higher.

NOAA’s outlook for yet another busy season follows a devastating period of heightened storm activity in the Atlantic. The 2021 season produced 21 named storms, the third-highest number on record, exhausting all of the names of the National Hurricane Center’s conventional naming list. In 2020, a record 30 named storms formed. As part of today’s meeting agenda, we will hear a comprehensive presentation on the NOAA forecast, which will allow us to better predict the impacts of major hurricanes on our countries.

Irrespective of the number of storms, every year, we are reminded that it only takes one storm to have a potentially devastating impact on a community, and in some cases, on an entire country. Regrettably, in the last few days alone, thousands of people have been displaced in northeastern Brazil after heavy rain caused flooding and landslides. This natural disaster claimed the lives of more than 100 people. Likewise, widespread flooding caused by heavy rains in Suriname has isolated communities, devastated crops, and shuttered schools and businesses.

Just prior to the start of this year’s Atlantic hurricane season, on May 30, Hurricane Agatha struck western Mexico, near Puerto Escondido, bearing maximum sustained winds of 105 miles per hour. According to the U.S. National Hurricane Center, this is the earliest that a Category 2 storm has made landfall along Mexico's Pacific Coast since modern record keeping began in 1949.

In view of these current events, the reality is that there is an ever-increasing urgency to recognize the expanding scope and frequency of these phenomena, and to be ever more prepared to face the imminent challenges ahead. Undoubtedly, we are living through a climate emergency, and the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic as well as a military invasion in Europe have only compounded the challenges we face as a region. As a result, the resources that we normally rely upon on to address these emergencies could be more limited this year.

This is precisely why we must redouble our commitment to strengthen coordinated multilateral action to respond to the immediate needs of Member States that may be affected by extreme weather events in the coming months.

To that end, the OAS General Assembly has adopted important Resolutions to further advance multilateral efforts and facilitate cooperation in responding to natural disasters. Through Resolution AG / RES. 2955 (L-O / 20), *“Advancing Hemispheric Initiatives on Integral Development: Promoting Resilience,”* the Statutes of this Committee were amended granting the Chair the authority to invite international organizations, international cooperation agencies, international financial institutions, regional development banks and competent regional inter-governmental organizations to join the Committee in its meetings and activities.

Last year, my Office, with technical support from the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development (SEDI), embarked on a process of meeting with each of the new partners individually to discuss the work of the IACNDR and their potential role in the Committee. During a three-month period, a round of informative meetings was held at the technical level with the points of contacts of the new partner organizations that accepted the meeting request. The meetings proved fruitful in sensitizing the new partners about the multilateral approach undertaken by the OAS to strengthen disaster resilience and also provided an opportunity to learn more about the potential role and contributions of each organization.

A comprehensive summary of these activities is included in the 2021 Annual Report of the Inter-American Committee on Natural Disaster Reduction (IACNDR), which was distributed to all Committee members prior to today’s meeting. In the interest of time, I will refrain from elaborating on this point. However, I urge you to review this document and I look forward to your views and proposals pertaining to the best way forward for future engagement with these new partners to best leverage their specific roles and contributions.

An opportunity to share these viewpoints will be afforded at the joint meeting of the OAS Permanent Council and the Interamerican Council for Integral Development (CIDI), convened for next Wednesday, June 29, and for which you have received an invitation.

This meeting comes as a result of the Organization’s commitment to strengthening the role of the OAS in advancing disaster resilience in the hemisphere. Specifically, the General Assembly mandated the Permanent Council and the Interamerican Council for Integral Development (CIDI), to “host a Hemispheric Encounter… to consider and offer recommendations for more inclusive innovative and integrative measures to improve the effectiveness of the role of the OAS in multilateral cooperation on disaster risk-reduction, response, recovery, and reconstruction, in order to advance disaster resilience in the hemisphere.”

Ladies and Gentleman, this afternoon we will hear presentations from our special guests and from members of the Committee on their plans to prepare for the hurricane and rainy seasons, and other potential calamities.

At this time, I would like to recognize Mr. Jamie Rhome, the Acting Director of the National Hurricane Center of the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Previous to his appointment as Acting Director, Mr. Rhome was the National Hurricane Center Deputy Director.

Mr. Rhome received both his Bachelor of Science degree and Master of Science degree in meteorology from North Carolina State University. He joined the National Hurricane Center in 1999 as a marine forecaster in the Tropical Analysis and Forecast Branch. He became a hurricane specialist in 2006 and was selected to lead NHC’s Storm Surge program in 2008. He was also selected for a temporary assignment to the White House’s Office of Science and Technology Policy in 2008/2009 where he served as a scientific policy analyst within the Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations. **Mr. Rhome, you have the floor.**

**(Remarks by Mr. Jamie Rhome)**

**(Introduction Tim Callaghan)**

At this time, I would like to introduce our second guest speaker, Mr. Tim Callaghan, Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean of the United States Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA).

Mr. Callaghan joined USAID/BHA as a disaster mitigation specialist in May 2000. He joined the Latin American and the Caribbean regional office team as a regional advisor in September 2001 and became the LAC senior regional advisor in May 2003. Prior to his tenure at this agency, he managed an important initiative to reduce the Central American region’s vulnerability to natural disasters, and his professional trajectory includes extensive work in the field in the Dominican Republic and Ecuador with the Peace Corps. His vast experience includes service as a U.S. Disaster Assistance Response Team leader in Haiti, Liberia, Peru, Sierra Leone, Jamaica, and The Bahamas, among other Caribbean States. **Mr. Callaghan, you have the floor.**

**(Remarks by Mr. Tim Callaghan)**

Thank you Mr. Callaghan, at this time it is my pleasure to recognize Ambassador Anthony Phillips-Spencer, Permanent Representative of Trinidad and Tobago to the OAS and Chair of the Committee on Hemispheric Security.

**(Remarks by Ambassador Philips)**

Our final presenter is Ms. Charlene Solozano, from the Department is Department for Sustainable Development, Executive Secretariat for Integral Development (SEDI), who will brief us on the approach undertaken by SEDI in support of the prevention, mitigation, and response efforts of the Member States. Ms. Osborne you have the floor.

**(Remarks by Charlene Solozano)**

Thank you Ms. Solozano. We now proceed to item 3 in today’s agenda. I open the floor to the members of the Inter-American Committee on Natural Disasters Reduction (IACNDR) that wish to address this session, and I would like to remind all participants that interpretation is being provided only in English and Spanish.

Delegations will be given an opportunity to ask questions after the Committee members make their presentations.