



**Remarks by OAS Assistant Secretary General  
Ambassador Nestor Mendez**

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

**April 15, 2021**

- H.E. Elisa Ruiz Díaz, Chair of the Permanent Council, Permanent Representative of Paraguay to the OAS;
- H.E. Lou-Anne Gaylene Gilchrist, Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the OAS;
- Distinguished Regional Coordinators and Permanent Observers to the OAS;
- Ms. Kim Hurtault-Osborne, Executive Secretary for Integral Development;
- Distinguished Members of the Inter-American Committee on Natural Disaster Reduction (IACNDR);

Good afternoon,

I am pleased to welcome you to this virtual meeting of the Inter-American Committee on Natural Disaster Reduction (IACNDR). As Chair of the Committee, and in consultation with the Ambassador of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, I have

convened this meeting to consider the pressing situation in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in the wake of the eruption of the La Soufrière volcano.

At this very moment, many of our brothers and sisters in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines are suffering from the impact of this ongoing volcanic activity. On behalf of the Secretary General and the OAS, we extend our deepest sympathy to and solidarity with the government and people of this beautiful island.

As you may be aware, after decades of inactivity, the volcano erupted on Friday, April 9, spewing dark clouds of gray smoke and ash into the air and sending a rapidly moving avalanche of hot rocks down the mountain.

Over the course of the week strong explosions have continued, causing power cuts, disrupting water supplies, and prompting an evacuation of thousands of people on the island.

The Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the Honourable Ralph Gonsalves declared a disaster alert, and subsequently issued an evacuation order, which is expected to result in the displacement of a significant share of the national population of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines beyond its national territory. It will be days before the true toll of this eruption is known, but we can expect a significant impact on the livelihoods, infrastructure, and economy of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and other nearby affected countries, which are already facing huge challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Notwithstanding, it has been encouraging to note that once again in times of crises, the international community has mobilized expeditiously to help our brothers and sisters in need. Several nations have provided support to house displaced persons from the affected area and many are deploying humanitarian aid and assistance.

Support has been mobilized by the member states of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and its regional institutions namely, the Seismic Research Centre (SRC) of the University of the West Indies (UWI) and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), to work alongside the National Emergency Management Organization (NEMO) of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and the Regional Security System (RSS).

Yesterday, the Member States of the OAS adopted a Resolution, *“Solidarity with and Support for the People and Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines,”* which calls for all necessary steps to be taken to mobilize an urgent response.

To that end, a meeting of this Committee has been convened to assist with disaster-response coordination amongst all of its members. Our goal is to define concrete and practical multilateral actions to facilitate a timely response to the urgent needs of those affected.

Today we will receive an update on the situation from the Permanent Representative of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the OAS, Ambassador Lou-Anne Gaylene Gilchrist.

Additionally, the Inter-American agencies represented here today will provide an overview of respective on-going relief efforts. It is our hope that we will be able to ascertain the immediate and post-disaster needs of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and coordinate response efforts currently underway on the ground.

As in previous years, the Inter-American Defense Board will be tasked with establishing a virtual situation room to monitor events through the collation of ‘open source’ information as well as reports prepared by the regional emergency operation institutions.

Permanent Observer Missions to the OAS were also invited to today’s meeting, as they are strategic partners in our coordination efforts and in offering assistance.

In addition to the presentations by the members of the Committee, the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development (SEDI) will provide a brief overview of the Organization’s efforts to provide technical assistance and support in the rebuilding process and in creating avenues to improve the lives of all those affected.

Ladies and gentlemen, a significant task lies ahead of us in ensuring that the people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines receive our full support during this troubling time. I know that together we can play an important role in rendering the much needed assistance.

Thank you