

Cooperative Republic of Guyana
Statement by
Honourable Joseph Harmon, MP, MSM
Minister of State
Fifth Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction of the Americas

Mr. Chairman, Excellency, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the people of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, I congratulate and thank, the Government and people of Columbia, The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) and Regional and global partners represented here today, for bringing us together to chart the course for building Global, Regional and National resilience.

Mr. Chairman, my presence here is indicative of the commitment made by the Government and people of Guyana towards reducing disaster risk. As I speak, Guyana with support from UNISDR and the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), is undertaking an audit of disaster management in an effort to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement. In this regard, Guyana has been hailed as a trail blazer among our counterparts.

Guyana, like many other nations, endorsed the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 – 2030 following the third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, in March 2015. Since then, the country has made considerable strides towards supporting the achievement of the seven (7) global targets of the Framework, in a bid to substantially reduce disaster risks at all levels.

Guyana is highly susceptible to flooding because of its vulnerabilities, particularly along the Low Coastal Plain (the main economic and administrative hub where approximately 90% of the population resides, and which is 1 to 3 meters below mean sea level) and the interior Regions of Cuyuni-Mazaruni (Region 7), Potaro-Siparuni (Region 8) and Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo (Region 9)). In light of this, since the Framework's adoption, the country has made considerable progressions towards the reduction of flood-related disaster risks through both hard and soft mechanisms. What is more notable however, is the fact that Guyana has since adopted a comprehensive disaster risk management approach, which has seen the expansion of disaster risk reduction efforts to include other non-traditional and less frequent hazards, including drought and fire, as well as the institutionalising of preventative and preparatory planning for all new and emerging risks at the national level, such as oil spills.

Guyana has recognised that there is a great need to be proactive to ensure that disaster risks do not undermine the enabling environment for socioeconomic development that

we are working to create. Along this trajectory, and in alignment with the Priorities for Action of the Sendai Framework, Guyana has integrated several mechanisms into the country's Disaster Risk Reduction system aimed at promoting enhanced monitoring of risks as well as informed and collaborative risk reduction planning and implementation. In 2015, for instance, the country reviewed and re-activated, with an expanded mandate, the National Disaster Risk Reduction Coordination Platform (NDRRCP), which is a committee designed to promote a coordinated approach and provide sound technical guidance for development and implementation of Disaster Risk Reduction projects, as well as to serve as the primary forum for the transparent exchange of information and joint, multi-stakeholder planning of disaster risk reduction, preparedness, response, and recovery initiatives. Additionally, Guyana has since established a National Emergency Monitoring System (NEMS), a 24-hour system that monitors social media, telephones, radio communications and television stations for incidents across the entire country and triggers individual agency responses, and if the needs arise, activates the National Emergency Operations Center for a multi-agency coordinated response.

With the understanding that disaster risk reduction is a key element of the development agenda, Guyana's progress in understanding disaster risk has kept pace with its economic growth. Noteworthy strides have been made in the area of understanding disaster risk as seven (7) of our ten (10) administrative Regions are now equipped with risk assessments and hazard maps that will shape the informed development planning within our country. This, Mr. Chairman, is a momentous achievement for Guyana as all but one (1) of our hinterland Regions have been assessed, mapped and sensitized. Ongoing risk assessment and sensitisation work is being done with the three (3) remaining administrative Regions.

Over the past four (4) years, the decentralisation of disaster risk governance within our local government system and across sectors has been a catalyst for action towards reducing risk. Guyana's national Disaster Risk Management framework now features multi-sectorial disaster management committees at the community, Regional, and national levels. The community and regional committees lend support to the work of the national disaster management platform in the coordination of Disaster Risk Management across sectors.

Guyana has made notable progress in the Framework's second and third Priorities for Action, as the country has directed considerable resources in the past three (3) years towards the development and enhancement of Disaster Risk Management systems at the (administrative) regional and community levels across the country, in a bid to substantially reduce the individual and collective risks of vulnerable geographic areas across the country. Further, this bottom-up approach to Disaster Risk Reduction has provided clear vision, plans, competence, guidance and coordination within and across

sectors, and ensures facilitates participation and capacity-building of relevant stakeholders at the local and grassroots levels.

Mr. Chairman, I am happy to report that preliminary results from our ongoing disaster management audit has highlighted the comprehensive nature of our community based disaster risk management programmes. These programmes are centered on community ownership and have seen the best results among our indigenous communities where risk identification and preparedness planning integrates traditional and indigenous knowledge with scientific methods.

Mr. Chairman, even as our efforts have borne fruit, Guyana recognises the need to scale up risk reduction interventions. The topography of our vast hinterland Regions, which have featured in international publications as “unchartered,” and undiscovered,” present challenges for building coping capacities at all levels, as vast resources are required for the development of critical facilities such as roads, bridges and health facilities within our hinterland communities. Our low lying coastal plain require significant scale-up of risk modeling programmes for priority hazards such as floods and storm surges.

Further, investments in disaster preparedness and mitigation have been heavily centered on government and civil society, while emergency response operations garner more attention from our private sector partners. Guyana therefore, recognizes the need for including within our development planning incentives to stimulate private sector investment in risk reduction, risk financing and insurance.

Mr. Chairman, in recognition that investment in disaster risk reduction must be in tangent with its economic growth, Guyana’s resilience roadmap to 2030 will feature:

- The scale-up of Community Based Disaster Risk Management programmes that are centered around increasing risk perception and climate change adaptation;
- Infrastructural development initiatives that are built on the principle of building back better;
- Legislative and policy development with a focus on the integration of key sectors such as the private sector;
- Scale-up of volunteer programmes in an effort to promote inclusivity and human resource development for Disaster Risk Reduction;
- And risk assessments that incorporate the use of geospatial referencing tools.

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I reinforce the firm commitment of the people of Guyana to reducing disaster risk and building resilience through Regional and International partnerships.

I thank you.