



Climate Change a Stormy topic at the UN General Assembly

By Colman Hands

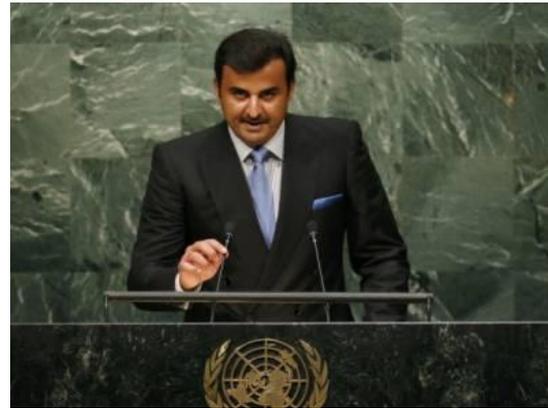
The Hurricane season has only just commenced in the Northern Hemisphere. However, the American coast has already endured battering's from Hurricane Harvey, which devastated Texas, and Hurricane Irma which came soon on its heels wreaking havoc down the coastal areas of the United States after passing through the Caribbean.

Although America is capable of surviving such damage, at a huge cost, small Caribbean nations, directly in the path of these Hurricanes, have a more devastating tale. In Barbuda, Hurricane Irma destroyed a 300-year-old civilization, in one fell swoop.

These horrible weather conditions are not isolated events. All across the world, the environment is in a war of attrition with human civilization. From the hurricanes in the Northern hemisphere, flooding in India, severe drought in the Horn of Africa, to giant mudslides in Sierra Leone.

The fact that the United States received a direct battering from the hurricanes drives home a reminding truth. Climate change is not concerned with borders and believers. This is coming in a year when the United States ominously pulled out from the Paris Climate Accord. The Paris Climate Accord was a clear example of world leaders coming together to work for the future of the planet.

Unlike all previous climate agreements, the Paris Accord did not put any quota on individual countries. Rather, it allowed countries to set their own nationally



determined emissions target. The only obligations each member nation has, is to regularly report on their emissions target every five years.

Solving climate change is a global issue and requires the cooperation of the whole world. It is not a task one nation can unilaterally carry out. The 72nd United Nation General Assembly is a ground for world leaders to cooperate. Expectedly, climate change has been a major topic at this General Assembly.

Although the United States President did not give a statement on climate change, other world leaders were eager to raise the issue. Some notable world leaders such as Angela Merkel, Vladimir Putin, and China's Xi Jinping were absent from the General Assembly. Despite their absence, their representatives reasserted their support for climate change initiatives in their individual addresses.

Angela Merkel was absent due to the preparations for the German elections while Xi Jinping due to the upcoming Communist Party Congress. Vladimir Putin was also not in attendance, choosing to engage in joint military exercises with Belarus.

Despite these abstentions, other world leaders spoke at length on climate change. His Highness, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al - Thani, the emir to the State of Qatar voiced a positive outlook, stating "We look forward to achieving the goals of the United Nations

Plan for Sustainable Development, which we have all committed to realize”.

The French President, Emmanuel Macron, said that there would be no renegotiations of the Paris Climate Accord, stating that “to unravel it would be to destroy a pact that was made not only between states but also between generations.” He pledged that the French Government would support the climate action with a contribution of €20 billion from now until 2020.

The Prime Minister of the UK, Theresa May, also had her view on climate change. She proclaimed that the Paris Accord was part of an international rules based system that ensured cooperation. Ultimately, she put it on the same pedestal as the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and their role in saving our planet.

The countries of the Caribbean, after enduring the full brunt of the recent hurricanes, dwelt on the issue of climate change as a result. All of their speeches at the United Nations General Assembly made reference to the global topic.

Roosevelt Skerrit, the Prime Minister of Dominica stated that denying climate change was a denial of the experience that the people of Dominica just lived through. He addressed the assembly expressing “To deny climate change is to procrastinate while the earth sinks; it is to deny a truth we have just lived. It is to mock thousands of my compatriots who in a few hours without a roof over their heads will watch the night descend on Dominica, in fear of sudden mudslides . . . and what the next hurricane may bring,”. He called for action instead of conversation because “while the big countries talk, the small island nations suffer”.

The Prime Minister of Saint Lucia, Michael Allen Chastanet, affirmed that the promise of the United Nations to small island nations is constantly being tested. The geographic position of these countries, as Islands on the

ocean, puts them at significant risk from climate change. He declared that an inadequate response of the international community to the issues of climate change would condemn future generations to certain doom. “I daresay, we do not have the luxury to be silent on this front anymore – we must act,” he stressed.

The Deputy Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Luis Straker, was more direct in his speech. According to him any denial of climate change is a “barefaced insult to the intelligence and experience of the peoples of Island States and Coastal areas.”

Talking specifically about the Paris Agreement, Luis Straker proclaimed categorically that any attempt to disavow the agreement was a direct act of hostility. “We draw a direct, causal connection between any such abdication and the future death and destruction that island states face as the result of increasingly frequent and intense weather events,” he reiterated.

The 72nd United Nation General Assembly, has highlighted a very pressing issue. The small nations of this world are suffering most from climate change although they have contributed little to cause it. The Prime Minister of Samoa, underlined the issue when he said: “Climate change, like other global challenges, cross borders seamlessly. It has no respect for sovereignty and does not discriminate countries between rich or poor.”