

Global Americans

High Level Working Group on Inter-American Relations and Bipartisanship

2019

The Caribbean's Extreme Vulnerability to Climate Change: A Comprehensive Strategy to Build a Resilient, Secure and Prosperous Western Hemisphere

Introduction

In 2017, with support from the Ford Foundation, Global Americans convened a working group of high-level former policymakers, civil society and business leaders and scholars to discuss bipartisan and cross-regional ways to build on the past two decades of Inter-American relations. The initial set of policy topics addressed by our High-Level Working Group on Inter-American Relations and Bipartisanship are closely connected, and they reflect a long-standing hemispheric and bipartisan consensus that has helped to promote U.S. and hemispheric economic, diplomatic and security interests.

In April 2018, our group, representing civil society, academia, and the policymaking and business communities in the U.S., Latin America and the Caribbean, published an initial series of papers laying out members' consensus opinions on the topics of:

- Economic integration and trade
- Combatting organized crime and narcotics trafficking
- Greater U.S.-Latin America collaboration on anti-corruption
- Expanding and improving education exchanges in the Americas
- Extra-hemispheric actors

Now in its second phase, the group is producing a further three papers on the topics of:

- The Venezuelan refugee crisis
- A comprehensive strategy for addressing climate change in the Caribbean
- The role of Latin America in global geopolitics

Climate change is already a challenge that places the future development and prosperity of citizens of the Americas in jeopardy. But specific hazards resulting from warmer temperatures, such as rising sea levels and more frequent and extreme weather events, make the Caribbean the most vulnerable sub-region, with many island nations, and other coastal communities, at risk of disappearing if the dangers of global warming are not addressed collectively and urgently today.

It is a fact that we can't prevent natural disasters from happening, but we can avoid the rippling effects of global warming and extreme weather events if we address climate change today. And nations in the Americas cannot wait any longer. Convinced that the countries of the Americas will be able to solve this shared challenge only through collaboration, the members of the high-level working group have produced a series of recommendations on how to best start addressing the effects of climate change, focusing on the particular vulnerabilities of the Caribbean as a high priority for the Western Hemisphere. The Caribbean region is a strategic and economically viable starting point for state, civil and private actors to build a regional resilience agenda to mobilize against the trickle-down effects of climate change with the aim of producing a more secure and prosperous hemisphere.

Global Americans

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Executive summary

Climate change and global warming are challenges that place the future resources, development and prosperity of citizens of the Americas in jeopardy. But specific hazards such as rising sea levels, warming temperatures, deforestation, and more frequent and extreme weather events, place the Caribbean at higher risk, to the point of coastal communities and entire islands potentially disappearing if the dangers of global warming are not addressed collectively and urgently today.

The National Climate Assessment reported in November 2018 that the U.S. alone could see its economy lose roughly as much as 10 percent by century's end—more than double the losses produced by the 2007 economic crisis—if significant steps are not taken to address climate change today. For the Caribbean, the estimated annual cost of inaction could total \$10.7 billion by 2025, \$22 billion by 2050 and \$46 billion by 2100, representing 5 percent, 10 percent and 22 percent of the region's GDP, respectively (Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre, 2012). These estimates are calculated based on only three variables: increased hurricane damage, loss of tourism revenue, and infrastructure damage—but even in this case, the net effect on this scale will likely cause a perpetual economic recession in each of the member states of the Caribbean Community.

As Caribbean nations and coastal territories in the Americas share similar infrastructure, economic and human mobility risks to climate change, this paper focuses on the particular vulnerabilities of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) located in the Caribbean—including, but not limited to, low availability of resources, high debt rates, threats to and relocation of coastal populations, and dependence on imports and global markets—to highlight the need and urgency to adopt collective measures to combat, adapt to and prevent further damage by climate change at a faster pace.

The paper also builds on existing initiatives at the local and international level focused on recovery, biodiversity preservation, risk mitigation, and adaptation to climate change to further improve cooperation in the Americas on climate change, with the objective of placing the region as a leading example for other coastal locations, small nations and states across the world, to replicate solutions and interventions as part of a long-term, holistic agenda against climate change. Recognizing that the burden is not for governments alone to bear, the paper also suggests specific actions the private sector, civil society, NGOs, international organizations, and organized communities can undertake, including funding to contribute to reconstruction and mitigation efforts.

We can't prevent natural disasters from happening, but we can avoid the ripple effects of global warming and extreme weather events if we address climate change and particular coastal challenges to adaptation and resilience, today. Working toward a holistic climate-change agenda not only means ensuring the survival of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) located in the Caribbean, but also means coordinating efforts to produce a more secure, resilient and prosperous hemisphere for the benefit of its citizens and future generations across borders.

Global Americans

High Level Working Group on Inter-American Relations and Bipartisanship

2019

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Report

I. The Situation Today

Identified as a “threat multiplier” by the U.S. Department of Defense in its “2014 Climate Change Adaptation Roadmap,” climate change and rising global temperatures related to human activity have the potential to exacerbate many of the challenges we are dealing with today, including global instability, hunger, poverty, migration, and conflict, placing the development and prosperity of citizens of the Americas in jeopardy. But specific hazards such as rising sea levels, warming temperatures, deforestation, and more frequent and stronger extreme weather events place the Caribbean at higher risk, to the point of entire islands potentially disappearing if the dangers of climate change are not addressed collectively and urgently today.

In 2017 alone, the Emergency Events Database (EM-DAT) recorded 367 natural disasters across the globe, including extreme weather events that affected nearly 96 million people at a total cost of \$326 billion in economic loss worldwide. For comparison, from 2007 to 2016, the same database recorded an annual average of 354 disasters, but at a price tag of \$142 billion on average economic loss for the decade.

From the 367 disasters recorded in 2017, 93 occurred in the Americas—24 and 28 of these in the U.S. and the Caribbean, respectively. The Americas also reported an 88 percent share in terms of global disaster-related economic losses, the highest in the world linked to a series of hurricanes that hit the U.S. and the Caribbean, including Hurricane Harvey, Hurricane Irma, and Hurricane Maria, that cost \$95 billion, \$80.7 billion, and \$69.7 billion respectively.

Facing first-hand stronger and more frequent, extreme weather events, the human, health, infrastructure, and overall economic costs for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Caribbean are not only higher, but cumulative, uneven, and many times exceeding the size of their own economies. For the 1990-2014 period, damage as a percentage of GDP was six times higher for the countries of the Caribbean and disasters occurred with seven times more frequency compared to other states (IMF, 2018).

For example, Hurricane Irma—which hit Florida September 10, 2017 and ranks fifth amongst the costliest storms on record for the United States according to the National Hurricane Center—threatened to destroy Florida’s entire farmlands, the number two produce grower in the U.S. after California. But in Barbuda, the first island in the Caribbean hit by the same hurricane (an island with a territory 300 times smaller than Florida’s) the hurricane left the island uninhabitable. With 95 percent of all buildings on the island either destroyed or significantly damaged and its 1,800 residents evacuated to neighboring Antigua, for the first time in 300 years there is not a single living person on the island of Barbuda (Caribbean Times, March 2019).

Global Americans

High Level Working Group on Inter-American Relations and Bipartisanship

2019

Most recently the region was victim of another natural disaster, Hurricane Dorian that hit the Virgin Islands on August 28, 2019. Dorian caused the greatest damage to the northern Bahamas, and then briefly made landfall over North Carolina's Outer Banks as it moved up the U.S. seaboard on its way to Canada. Dorian's official death toll is 61, but this figure is likely to increase as we learn more about the effects of Dorian in the coming months. Additionally, the hurricane left an estimated 70,000 Bahamians homeless, including a smaller Haitian undocumented population still in shelters at risk of deportation.

Added to the exposure to cumulative recovery costs, natural disasters take a large toll on the Caribbean's future economic growth and development opportunities. For the Caribbean's coastal communities, recovery costs take away scarce resources from development and social spending budgets, hampering the possibilities of a speedy reconstruction and the prospects of sustained economic development and wellbeing (IMF, 2018). This means that for the Caribbean it can take years or even decades for island economies to recover from the impact of a single natural event. Many Caribbean islands also have significant amounts of international debt that make paying for protective and adaptation measures simply too costly to bear or to even consider in yearly budgets or government development plans.

Puerto Rico and Haiti are unfortunately the best examples of failing to adequately respond to and prepare for climate change's adverse effects. Barely 10 days after Hurricane Irma hit Florida, Hurricane Maria—the deadliest storm to hit the United States in the past 100 years—made landfall in Puerto Rico. As pointed out by the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), rainfall in Puerto Rico has increased by 30 percent from 1958 to 2016; sea level has risen by about four inches since 1960 and oceans are warmer by more than 1.5 degrees Celsius since the 1900s. The three factors combined contributed to a tragedy that the island has not been able to overcome to this day. EDF also reported that as a result of Hurricane Maria 2,975 people died; almost all the island residents lost power for an average of 84 days (some for up to 300 days); almost 12 percent of the population left the island and over half have not returned since; poverty levels rose as high as 52 percent of the entire population.

Haiti, on the other hand, between 2010-2018, has experienced another 33 natural events in the form of droughts, epidemics, floods, and storms, after barely surviving the devastating earthquake that left nearly 300,000 dead, another 300,000 injured and approximately 1.5 million people displaced. Hurricane Matthew (2016) destroyed the entire crop yield in the departments of Grand'Anse, Sud, Sud-Est and Nippes and affected approximately 2.1 million people. Hurricane Irma (2017) damaged crops in the Nord-Est department. Moreover, the high probability of an "El Niño" climate phenomenon taking place every year—a complex weather pattern resulting from variations in ocean temperatures—increases the risk of deteriorating land conditions in the island.

It's equally important to mention that deforestation levels in Haiti contribute to worsen the effects of extreme weather events. According to a recent study conducted by Temple University, Oregon State University, the U.S. Forest Service, and Société Audubon Haiti, at current deforestation rates—largely driven by small-scale farming and charcoal production—Haiti is at risk of losing its forests within two decades from now, from its already depleted stock. Apart from wildlife mass extinction due to habitat loss, without trees to soak up rainwater and slow runoff, lowland areas are much more prone to catastrophic floods. Unlike neighboring Dominican Republic, that has implemented sustainable forest management practices to focus on forest degradation—while helping the country become more resilient to the impacts of climate change—hundreds to thousands of Haitians will suffer each year from flooding that could be controlled if primary forests are preserved and reforestation efforts are developed.

Global Americans

High Level Working Group on Inter-American Relations and Bipartisanship

2019

As of today, about 2.6 million Haitians out of a population of 11 million are still in need of humanitarian assistance and at risk of acute food insecurity. Successive aftershocks, combined with structural weaknesses that limit access to basic services, will continue to deteriorate the living conditions of the most vulnerable in Haiti (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2019). Additionally, for the approximately 46,000 Haitian immigrants that still hold Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in the United States as a result of the 2010 earthquake—set to expire in January 2020—Haiti’s vulnerable, struggling economy is no shape to reabsorb them.

Another phenomenon that must be factored into the climate change equation is environmentally driven migration, already visible in parts of the Americas. As coastal flooding and erosion increases, the Caribbean will be one of the fastest displaced communities across the globe, a pattern soon to be replicated in other coastal communities and cities across the Americas, including the United States. According to María Cristina García, an expert on environmentally driven migration at Cornell University, by mid-century the number of displaced peoples by climate change may be as high as 200 million. Concerned that climate refugees do not fall under the current definition of a refugee—and thus protection under international law—García has alerted the international community on this new form of internal displacement, which has started to hit particularly hard Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, and the Caribbean. At the same time, citizens from the developed north have also benefitted from migration back and forth from the Caribbean, including for education. Climate change will also limit those possibilities should Caribbean economies and infrastructure suffer.

II. The Caribbean Deserves High Priority Attention and Action from all countries in the Americas. Here’s why:

a) Preserving Caribbean biodiversity is essential to the survival of the region’s marine ecosystem and of the islands themselves

The Caribbean islands hold approximately 10,000 km of reef, 22,000 km² of mangrove, and about 33,000 km² of sea grass beds. The Caribbean is also home to the Andros Island Barrier Reef, and shares the nearby Mesoamerican Barrier Reef, the second largest in the world, with Central America.

But two of the main threats resulting from global warming—coral bleaching and erosion—place the Caribbean’s biodiversity at risk of disappearing. As a result of coral bleaching, the abundance of reef-building corals has decreased by more than 80 percent on many Caribbean reefs from 1977 to 2001 and eroding shorelines have already been documented across the Caribbean.

These marine ecosystems—that attract thousands of tourists every year and help create jobs—also play a significant role in supplying sediment to island shores and in dissipating wave energy, which reduces potential shoreline erosion. As a result of climate change and warmer temperatures, in 2010, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) forecast that a one-meter sea level rise by 2100 is now inevitable.

Global Americans

High Level Working Group on Inter-American Relations and Bipartisanship

2019

This will affect all Caribbean nations, as major cities, ports and airports; and approximately 70 percent of the Caribbean population lives on the coast. As sea levels continue to rise, these major urban areas will flood, causing disastrous problems to infrastructure and to entire populations. To name just one case, Santo Domingo will be the second-most-affected city in Latin America by rising global sea levels, salt-water erosion and coastal flooding, and one of the five cities most affected at a global scale. Imagining a Caribbean without its world-famous beaches is a real possibility by 2050, and not to mention a significant relocation of people and the rebuilding of entire coastal infrastructures.

b) Failing to address climate change will reverse economic, health and development progress

The projected consequences of climate change for the Caribbean have strong implications not only for today's economy, but also for the long-term development of the entire region. The sectors at higher risk include tourism, fishery, agriculture, human settlements, and infrastructure (UNDP, 2018).

Caribbean islands have diversified their economies away from agriculture and moved into tourism and services. But although tourism makes up for 15 percent of the Caribbean's GDP, agriculture is still a major land-use activity. The effect of extreme weather events on countries that dedicate large areas of land to agricultural production for export can be particularly devastating. Recent extreme weather events, at times, have wiped out the entire sugar cane production of Cuba, banana plantations in Jamaica, Saint Lucia and Dominica, and decimated nutmeg exports from Grenada.

Water temperature increase also poses a particular challenge on Caribbean export fisheries. In Barbados, where yellow fin tuna is the island's greatest fish export, as surface temperature rises, tuna is forced to move northward to find the oxygen it needs to live. This means fishermen must move deeper to find high quality tuna, adding fuel costs in the sector, but most importantly raising territorial implications in the Caribbean. The same goes for flying fish. In a typical year, flying fish account for around 65 percent of the total fish catch in Barbados, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. But as flooding increases, changing the direction of surface water current, fishers are forced to travel farther into the ocean going as far as 500 km away from Barbados, reducing catches of an important staple for local residents (St. Lucia Times, 2019).

The consequences of inaction also paint a devastating picture for future health and wellbeing. Between 2001 and 2009 there were 211,937 registered cases of dengue fever in the Caribbean. Climate change is expected to increase dengue fever transmission by 300 percent, as increased temperature reduces parasites' incubation time. Additionally, if climate change is not addressed today, between 2030 and 2050, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea, and heat stress (ECLAC 2011 and Sealy, H. 2018).

Global Americans

High Level Working Group on Inter-American Relations and Bipartisanship

2019

c) Cooperation on climate change could be a bright spot for hemispheric relations and has started

As governments and companies increasingly realize that taking action on climate change today not only makes economic sense but is a matter of survival, climate change represents common ground for regional cooperation and a bright spot to further improve relations at a time of divisive politics and world polarization. According to the “Insights” report from Vanderbilt’s University Latin America Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), based on 2016-2017 data, citizens of the Americas are very concerned about the lack of action on climate change. Concern is highest in Mexico and Central America, with eight in 10 adults believing that climate change is a “very serious” problem for their country. South America follows with 7.5 in 10 adults. In the Caribbean 6.6 in 10 adults, and in the U.S. and Canada almost four in 10 adults, say unchecked climate change is a “very serious” problem.

Latin America and the Caribbean are on a good path toward leading climate change efforts globally. Two concrete examples take place this year. This past September 2019, U.N. Secretary General António Guterres convened a Climate Action Summit during the 74th UN General Assembly that brought climate action to the top of the international agenda. The second event will take place December 2019, as Chile hosts the next Conference of the Parties (COP25). During this opportunity, the Western Hemisphere must take the lead and construct a holistic regional climate change agenda, placing the Caribbean as an international priority to address, adapt to and prevent climate change, and propose funding mechanisms to target the three activities, emphasizing the particular vulnerabilities of coastal communities across the Americas.

Additionally, working as a bloc to address climate change could have a positive geostrategic effect and overlap with concern that China is gaining ground in the region. (For this see our accompanying paper on Latin America and the Caribbean in geostrategic politics.) China has been smart to generate goodwill with Caribbean nations, providing funds totaling \$5 million for the UNDP to assist Caribbean nations (Barbuda and Dominica) rebuild following the 2017 hurricane season. As much as the Caribbean must remain open to foreign aid from as many sources as possible, the Americas—and the United States in particular—cannot afford to risk losing advantage and engagement with the Caribbean that could in turn undermine broader security, development, well being, and human displacement goals.

III. What Steps Have Caribbean Nations Taken to Address Climate Change?

As inaction toward climate change jeopardizes the region’s survival, Caribbean nations have responded beyond their own economic and infrastructure capabilities, pushing forward individual and collective initiatives that are both affordable and scalable, aimed at recovering from, adapting to, and preventing further climate change damage.

To start, Caribbean nations have shown extraordinary political will and leadership putting forward carbon emission reduction pledges and nudging bigger players to do the same. Caribbean nations, along with other Small Island Developing States, played a key role in calling for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to produce a special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius compared to impacts at higher temperatures. Furthermore, although the Caribbean’s global emissions are minimal globally, all Caribbean states have submitted their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), a document mandated by the Paris Agreement that embodies the efforts by each country to reduce national emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change by 2030 and beyond.

Global Americans

High Level Working Group on Inter-American Relations and Bipartisanship

2019

Action against climate change has not been limited to international pronouncements, commitments or ratifications. Countries such as Jamaica have launched individual Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management offices. But Caribbean nations are also coordinating as a bloc to establish disaster preparedness and risk-reduction plans among key state and non-state agencies. One example is the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), a regional intergovernmental agency for disaster management in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). In 2009 CDEMA fully embraced the principles of Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM), an integrated and proactive approach to disaster management that seeks to reduce the risk and loss associated with natural and technological hazards and the effects of climate change to enhance regional sustainable development.

In terms of risk mitigation and adaptation to climate change, with support from the UNDP, many Caribbean countries have already mainstreamed adaptation measures and climate change policies into national development plans. In at least five countries, National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) already integrate adaptation into planning and budgeting across ministries, as a strategy to optimize resources and approach the climate change issue through multi-sectorial action, and not as a problem of a single ministry. Countries like Barbados, Grenada, Haiti, and Dominica have gone a step further and have either passed climate change adaptation bills or verification systems that track carbon emissions.

Across borders, collective opportunities to share experiences on adaptation planning and capacity building have also emerged. The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC) and the Regional Gateway for Technology Transfer and Climate Change Action in Latin America and the Caribbean (REGATTA) are a few intra-regional examples.

On the international front, extra-regional cooperation has also played a key role in strengthening resilience building plans and programs in the Caribbean. Countries like Canada, Italy, Japan, and the United States support strategies such as the Japan-Caribbean Climate Change Partnership (J-CCCP) or the newly created U.S.-Caribbean Resilience Partnership, a collaborative effort under the U.S. Caribbean 2020 framework to confront disaster response and promote resilience. The inaugural edition of the U.S.-Caribbean Resilience Partnership, held April 11-12, 2019 at the U.S. Southern Command headquarters in Miami and led by U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John Sullivan, convened senior leaders from 18 countries in the Caribbean, as well as representatives of the CDEMA and other critical disaster response organizations. And in October 23-24, the U.S - Caribbean Resilience Partnership will have held the first working group conference in Bridgetown, Barbados.

Yet, as the main source of funding for adaptation remains project-based, international finance and humanitarian aid, alternative and coordinated sources for climate financing, including international actors and the private sector remain unexplored (UNDP, 2018).

Global Americans

High Level Working Group on Inter-American Relations and Bipartisanship

2019

IV. Our Recommendations

Focusing on the specific vulnerabilities of coastal communities to climate change, the following recommendations aim to place the Caribbean at a higher priority for the attention of all countries in the Americas, encouraging broader support and funding to move from recovery initiatives, to broader prevention and adaptation measures to climate change at the necessary speed to avoid further damage to the Caribbean's biodiversity, infrastructure, development, and overall human well-being.

- 1) We encourage all governments in the Caribbean and neighboring coastal communities in the Americas (U.S., Mexico, Central and South America) to coordinate and fund a long-term Regional Climate Change Agenda that, by focusing on the Caribbean region, allows coastal locations in the Americas to adopt a basic roadmap to prevent and adapt to climate change by 2050.** Considering the particular vulnerability of coastal communities in the Americas to climate change, our high-level working group strongly recommends establishing a regional climate change agenda, and a prospective financial fund with yearly revisions, that focuses on the region's Small Island Developing States as a first step to better face and adapt to the multiplying threats of climate change at a greater scale, including a long-term plan centered on potential environmentally displaced peoples by 2050. We strongly encourage U.S. Congress members with a large Caribbean population in their districts or states to participate and elevate the initiative at the federal level.

Focusing on the Caribbean to build a climate-change, resilience agenda would allow the hemisphere to raise awareness of the Caribbean's particular vulnerability and uneven conditions to mitigate and adapt to climate change by 2050; serve as a platform for strong collaboration and exchange of technology, knowledge, best practices, loans and other forms of funding to help the Caribbean better absorb the costs of climate change adaptability; serve as a real laboratory to produce scalable and innovative solutions for the rest of the region's coastal communities to respond to and adapt to climate change better and faster. We encourage founding member states to include since the early stages, actors from the private and insurance sectors, civil society leaders and community organizers, and representatives from international organizations and regional banks to serve as liaisons to communicate existing efforts and evaluate the feasibility and funding of the program for the long-term.

- 2) Increase intra-Caribbean cooperation in disaster-risk management and response programs.** Considering the financial and infrastructure constraints the nations of the Caribbean deal with, the high-level working group recognizes and applauds the individual efforts countries have advanced to integrate adaptation to climate change into planning and budgeting across departments in the form of the National Adaptation Plans (NAPs). We encourage countries in advanced stages of planning, such as Barbados and Jamaica, to share these streamlined processes with less- or non-adapted countries and to monitor progress on a yearly basis. We also encourage talent exchange between countries that have approved climate change adaptation policies, bills or verification systems that track carbon emissions with those in initial adaptation stages.

Global Americans

High Level Working Group on Inter-American Relations and Bipartisanship

2019

- 3) Place the Caribbean’s particular vulnerability to climate change as a top priority at international climate change conferences and meetings where countries of the Americas participate on a regular basis.** The Americas has hosted three of the major climate-change conferences occurring in 2019, the U.N. Climate Action Summit during the U.N. General Assembly high-level week; the Latin America and Caribbean Climate Week in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil; and the Conference of the Parties (COP25) in Santiago, Chile. These events represent a unique opportunity where countries in the Americas can come together and highlight the particular and uneven vulnerability of coastal communities to climate change, making the case that addressing and adapting to climate change in the Caribbean is both urgent and smart policy. In case there is not a specific forum established to address the Caribbean region in particular or Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in general, we encourage Caribbean SIDS to request a special and exclusive session, and other nations in the Americas to support and actively participate in the realization of such a forum.
- 4) Monitor and hold accountable regional countries’ national pledges to stick to carbon emission levels determined by the Paris Agreement.** As a measure to prevent increased global warming, the Paris Agreement’s central aim is to strengthen the global response to global temperature rise this century well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase even further to 1.5 degrees Celsius. To this end, the Paris Agreement requires all parties to put forward their best efforts through nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and to strengthen these efforts in the years ahead. This includes requirements that all parties report regularly on their emissions and on their implementation efforts. All nations in the Caribbean have submitted their NDCs on time, but considering the region’s minimal carbon emissions, and the unequal and uneven consequences suffered by Caribbean nations, we encourage all countries in the Americas to monitor and hold each other accountable to their own carbon emissions pledge on an annual basis, verifiable at the yearly UN General Assembly each September.
- 5) Expand the U.S. Caribbean Energy Security Initiative to adopt new and sustainable revenue streams to diversify Caribbean economies.** We applaud the United States’ announcement of a new \$25 million loan guarantee under the Caribbean Energy Security Initiative to spur private sector investment in non-oil energy projects, and we encourage further investment and expansion of the program’s scope. We additionally encourage Caribbean neighbors in the Americas to explore new and sustainable ways to unlock the Caribbean’s potential to develop alternative and sustainable revenue streams. One possibility is establishing a private venture capital fund, to finance the high up-front costs of migrating to renewable energy sources, and supporting the adoption of electric mobility to move away from fossil fuel dependency. Other countries like St. Vincent and the Grenadines are exploring bolder initiatives transforming their whole agro-industry. As reported by Fitch Ratings, in December 2018, the Saint Vincentian parliament passed a bill to decriminalize marijuana and allow the country to begin exporting medical marijuana. The country reportedly is one of the larger Caribbean growing centers for marijuana, due to the favorable microclimates in the islands, with medical marijuana exports likely supporting an agricultural sector that has flagged in recent years. Countries in the hemisphere could help support Caribbean government’s study new developments in agriculture and other industries.

Global Americans

High Level Working Group on Inter-American Relations and Bipartisanship

2019

- 6) **Develop and strengthen coastal locations, urban infrastructure and biodiversity preservation programs with private sector funding and community level support.** Given the high dependency on tourism activity, the private sector can and must play a significant role in installing and developing resistant infrastructure and biodiversity preservation initiatives in the at-risk coastal communities in the Caribbean, in turn creating job opportunities for the local community and foreign investment opportunities.

A public-private partnership that includes a commitment by hotel chains and tourism companies, at the very least, to fund disaster recovery efforts and build new developments under strict LEED certifications in exchange for establishing and/or expanding their operations at coastal communities is an opportunity to develop new ways of funding coastal biodiversity preservation efforts and resilience building programs.

The High Level Working Group also encourages placing the issue of reforestation as a preventive measure to climate change's habitat damage as a priority, taking as a model the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPP). The FCPF is a global partnership of governments, businesses, civil society, and indigenous peoples focused on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation with a community-based approach. The Dominican Republic is a beneficiary of such a program, and we encourage other Caribbean islands to evaluate replicating such model at the domestic level or requesting adherence to FCPP through the World Bank.

- 7) **Preserve and broaden U.S.–Caribbean climate change-related agreements and partnerships.** The United States has shown a genuine interest in supporting the Caribbean's efforts to transform into disaster resilient economies. In particular, we applaud the administration's U.S.-Caribbean Resilience Partnership created last April, and we encourage including key actors from neighboring coastal communities in the Americas to observe and participate in future working group conferences and meetings to engage in knowledge and best practice sharing toward climate change resilience building.

Additionally, we encourage the U.S. administration—and particularly Congressmen and Congresswomen with large Caribbean constituencies—to pledge for funding directed at the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the first international fund under the United Nations with the express goal of supporting countries in the global South build clean energy, climate resilient economies. The U.S. pledged \$3 billion to the Green Climate Fund in 2014 and had transferred \$1 billion by early 2017 (World Resources Institute, 2019). However, the Trump administration announced it would cancel the remaining \$2 billion funding, while France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Norway, Denmark and Sweden have recently doubled their pledges. Given the clear national interest of the U.S. on issues of security, migration, economic development and the safety of its own citizens and how those will all be affected strongly by extreme weather, we strongly urge the administration to continue funding the Green Climate Fund at the original amount at the very least.