

Headline: Islands of climate ambition

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KINGSTON/SUVA — Small island developing states like ours are barometers of the world's commitment to climate action and sustainable development. Our economies and societies thrive when national ambitions and progress are supported by bold global action. However, global inaction on climate change is threatening our way of life, development achievements and growth prospects, and jeopardizing our efforts to adapt to global warming.

The existential threat posed by climate change has spurred us, the leaders of two island states, to take decisive action in our own countries.

Although small islands bear the least responsibility for climate change, we stand to lose the most as a result of its effects, owing partly to our small size and fragile economies. In addition, our populations, critical infrastructure and key economic assets are highly exposed to extreme weather events, rising sea levels and other hazards. The recent destruction wrought by Hurricane "Dorian" in the Bahamas is the latest example of how vulnerable small island states are. So while much of the world does not treat global warming with the same sense of urgency, countries like ours have no choice but to act. Small island states have therefore taken the lead globally and are continuing to demand immediate action to limit global warming to 1.5°C above preindustrial temperatures—a goal of the landmark 2015 Paris climate agreement.

Although our two islands' carbon dioxide emissions are already negligible, we are leading by example in this area. Both Fiji and Jamaica have taken decisive steps to reduce emissions further by adopting increasingly ambitious renewable-energy targets, strengthening energy policy frameworks and seeking to increase carbon sinks through improved forest management. Despite limited resources, our countries are also making valiant efforts in two other areas that are critical for our prosperity and security: innovative climate financing and ambitious adaptation programs.

Guided by a World Bank-led vulnerability assessment, Fiji has formulated a National Adaptation Plan and has embedded climate considerations into its national development plans. The government is also finalizing one of the world's most ambitious climate-change laws, and has developed some of the first guidelines for relocating coastal communities, along with establishing a relocation trust fund.

Last but not least, Fiji is using new technologies and approaches to reduce disaster risk, transform energy systems and nurture a viable new sustainable economy. Similarly, Jamaica's economy-wide efforts to build climate resilience have earned global recognition. For example, the government's National Disaster Risk Finance Strategy paves the way to unlocking private-sector financing for climate action, identifies priority sectors for emissions reductions and will help the country's institutions to manage a wide range of climate-finance instruments.

But despite our countries' best efforts to boost resilience to climate change and strengthen national emissions-reduction targets, the cost of fully adapting our economies exceeds our available means. In Fiji, the cost over the next 10 years will total \$4.5 billion, almost equivalent to the country's annual GDP. In Jamaica, the government is currently developing National Adaptation Plans for key sectors in order to better understand needs and develop accurate cost projections. But by some estimates, Jamaica could experience between \$317 million and \$7.3 billion worth of hurricane-related damage and losses.

Unless major economies start reducing their CO2 emissions immediately, the costs — in terms of lives, biodiversity and culture — will be vastly higher for both us and them.

We call upon developed countries to honor their commitment to mobilize at least \$100 billion in climate finance per year by 2020 to address the needs of developing countries, particularly small island states. We also call upon developed countries and global financial organizations to revise global financial rules that were developed without small island states in mind. We urgently need new approaches to funding climate action, new partnerships with the private sector and new ways to share expertise.

We cannot solve this problem on our own. Developed countries must lead the global effort to mobilize climate finance, and tangibly support the expansion of island states' efforts to safeguard economic gains and preserve our cultures. —Project Syndicate

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Andrew Holness is the prime minister of Jamaica. Frank Bainimarama is the prime minister of Fiji.

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