

**79TH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY
MAY 18-23, 2026
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Response to Director General's Statement

Jamaica thanks the Director-General for leading WHO's achievements. We note the emphasis on strengthening disaster management and find this very relevant.

Jamaica faced, in October 2025, the passage of Hurricane Melissa, a Category 5 Hurricane with winds near 298 km/h, one of the strongest storms ever recorded in the Atlantic. This disaster exposed vulnerabilities in infrastructure and healthcare systems, and highlighted the increasing threat posed by climate-intensified hurricanes in the Caribbean.

Approximately 1.5 million Jamaicans were severely affected. More than 100,000 homes were lost with several persons displaced to shelters. Communities were isolated with loss of roads, communication systems and electricity network. Survivors experienced severe psychological trauma. One third of health facilities experienced severe disruption.

Hurricane Melissa triggered one of the largest emergency public health responses in Jamaica's recent history. We responded with timely and sustained activation of emergency operation centres. With loss of communication islandwide, the rapid deployment of technical and support teams to the hardest hit areas allowed for rapid assessments and organization of relief.

We are pleased that within 1-3 days we restored essential health services through the deployment of mobile teams and setting up of temporary facilities. We prioritized reopening of facilities; rapid transfer and fortification of standing facilities; continuation of priority services such as immunization, antenatal care, mental health services and ensuring distribution of medications to persons with chronic diseases.

Local and foreign medical teams provided manpower and temporary infrastructure. Jamaica has learnt a lot about safe and efficient deployment of incoming resources such as Emergency Medical Teams. We are looking forward to sharing our perspective and insights on what works best for countries in distress.

We prevented outbreaks of mosquito borne illnesses and rapidly controlled a Leptospirosis outbreak through early interventions. Despite displacement of thousands of persons to shelters,

we prevented outbreaks in shelters through prioritizing WASH activities and health inspections.

Jamaica's thousands of health care workers responded well, despite suffering personal losses. I take this opportunity on the world stage, to salute them and to recognize their commitment.

Reducing the impact of climate-related disasters requires coordinated global action. Climate events are becoming more frequent and severe. The world needs to slow climate change itself, and strengthen resilience to unavoidable impacts.

Small island developing states are calling for urgent action. Larger and wealthier countries must play a critical role to reduce the impacts of climate change. They must reduce greenhouse gas emissions rapidly, provide climate finance, support disaster preparedness and early warning systems, transfer technology and expertise, assist with climate resilient infrastructure, provide humanitarian and recovery support and promote fair global climate policies.

I thank you.