

Climate change effects project bleak outlook for Puerto Rico and the rest of the Caribbean islands ^[1]

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Rueanna Haynes, a specialist in international climate law and governance, gave the keynote lecture at the Caribe Fest event. (Supplied)

This was stated by Rueanna Haynes, an expert in climate governance who was on the island to present the keynote address at the Caribe Fest event, focused on the climate crisis.

Climate governance expert Rueanna Haynes warned that as part of the effects of global climate change, Caribbean islands such as Puerto Rico could see their coastal communities disappear, fresh water become too salty to be consumed, and temperatures so high that survival will be difficult or, in some cases, impossible.

Haynes made the remarks as part of the keynote address "Major Challenges of the Global Climate Crisis for the Caribbean," given Friday as part of Caribe Fest, an event organized by the Center for Investigative Journalism (CPI) in San Juan.

"Everyone living today will experience the impact of a warmer planet," said Haynes, who added that other possible effects for Caribbean countries could be felt in agriculture and in the difficulty of producing food.

The former diplomat, a native of Trinidad and Tobago, indicated that the "outlook for the islands is not easy" and mentioned the example of the Marshall Islands in the Pacific. The expert mentioned

that in these islands, the coastal coastline has been protected to try to prevent an increase in the loss of corals, because if they disappear, one of the islands will also disappear.

The expert indicated that, at a global level, it is estimated that with an increase in temperature of 2° there will be no coral reefs left. Currently, the temperature is 1.1°, but according to her, by 2030 the opportunity to keep it under control will be lost.

As for what she called the "catastrophic" outlook facing Puerto Rico and other Caribbean islands, Haynes stressed that it is due to the lack of action and planning to address the impact of the climate crisis. The failure, she said, lies in not implementing public policies that promote adaptability to climate events that are already occurring and, in turn, protect the ecosystems needed to survive.

Haynes, who has more than a decade of experience in United Nations (UN) climate processes, explained the "worrying" effect of global warming throughout the region, where catastrophic hurricanes, the disappearance of coral reefs, flooding due to extreme rains, droughts, rising sea levels and temperatures, among other problems, are becoming increasingly common. She stressed that all these phenomena are aggravated by unbridled construction in areas that should be protected, such as the coastal coastline and forests.

"We have to take responsibility and that is something I don't see enough of. There is a lot that can still be done in terms of planning, what kind of buildings we allow to be built, where we allow them, where we allow mangroves to be removed.

All of these decisions will have a very real impact on the ability to respond to a crisis caused by others," she said in her lecture.

She also emphasized the need to base planning and any mitigation strategy on scientific information. To this end, he mentioned the importance of overcoming the challenge of the scarcity of information on the impact of the climate crisis, particularly in the islands. Only in this way, "the future will be better for all of us," Haynes stressed.

Again taking the Marshall Islands as an example, she recommended that solutions be conceptualized at the local level, because when large organizations impose theirs, "nine times out of ten," things don't work. She stressed that it is the people living in the communities who have to cooperate directly to bring about changes for the benefit of their ecosystems and must also make the sacrifices required to implement them.

Haynes called attention to the importance of discussing the impact of colonialism on the climate crisis, as it has a direct bearing on how international climate money is distributed. Colonies are not represented in the main negotiation processes where strategies are decided and funds for preparedness and adaptation, as well as disaster mitigation, are distributed.

She also mentioned that the colonies deserve reparations for the inequity to which they have been subjected and which aggravates their vulnerabilities in the face of the climate crisis, although this language is not yet used in the United Nations processes.

The Caribe Fest was an event dedicated to the issue of the climate crisis and was held from Thursday to Saturday with the participation of representatives from Puerto Rico and 13 Caribbean countries. The day included workshops, talks and panels aimed at promoting oversight and the search for solutions to this global problem.

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