

Dear colleagues,

On March 6th 2019 Cyclone Idai hit the African mainland – Mozambique, Malawi and Zimbabwe- touching it again on March 9th, making it one of the worst natural disasters ever in the Southern Hemisphere. Floodwater, rising to 6 meters, destroyed communities totally.

In these three affected countries, almost a thousand people died, many more have been injured, thousands are still missing, almost 3 million people have been affected, amongst them 1.5 million children. It is still too early to gauge the magnitude of this devastation and to know the exact numbers.

Hospitals are damaged, houses are destroyed, infrastructure washed away and many acres of crops which were about to be harvested are destroyed, bringing these countries close to famine.

Currently, cholera is spreading fast, malaria, skin infections and other water borne diseases may follow soon, leading to starvation unless help reaches enough people quickly.

While the water level is now lowering down, this disaster will put an enormous setback to the development of this region. This part of the world needs our help and attention, now and in the years to come, to overcome this disaster.

Urgent action by the international community to provide for relief, medications, shelters, water treatment devices, vaccines, food is now needed, with special focus on the most vulnerable: children, women, people with disabilities and elderly.

The UN has made an appeal for 300 million dollar for the coming three months, for Mozambique alone, while so far, only 40 million dollar has been made available. We need to raise attention to the needs of this region so more countries will support them.

But this is not the only reason why we should discuss this issue within the IPU. This is not just another natural disaster.

We will experience more extreme weather conditions as an effect of global warming. The damage as a result of this extreme weather conditions will have a much larger impact to lower and middle-income countries.

We must step up our actions. We need to make sure that we will do the utmost to achieve the goals made in Paris in 2015 to keep global warming below 2.0 degrees, to lower the chance that this region and other parts of the world will be affected by such a catastrophic event again.

I ask for your support to address this disaster in Southern Africa. And I call upon you, to urge your governments to provide for assistance and follow up commitments.

Thanking you for your attention.

Arda Gerkens