

**Statement from the Director of the Antigua and Barbuda Meteorological Service (ABMS)
on the occasion of the Observance of World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought
17 June 2026**

Theme: “Rangelands: Recognize. Respect. Restore.”

Today, Antigua and Barbuda joins the international community in observing World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, a day dedicated to raising awareness of the growing threats posed by drought, land degradation, and desertification, and the urgent need for sustainable land and water management.

This year's observance comes at a particularly challenging time for our nation. Antigua and Barbuda is currently experiencing a serious drought, with conditions expected to worsen in the months ahead. As we approach the traditional wet season (July to December), climate forecasts indicate that rainfall for the remainder of the year is likely to be below normal, increasing the likelihood that drought conditions will intensify and potentially reach severe levels.

The primary driver of this anticipated dryness is the expected development and persistence of a strong El Niño event, with the potential to reach super El Niño strength. Historically, El Niño events have been associated with significant reductions in rainfall across Antigua and Barbuda and the wider Caribbean, often resulting in widespread water shortages, agricultural losses, environmental stress, and socioeconomic impacts.

Recent climate observations underscore the seriousness of the situation. May 2026 was the third driest May on record for Antigua and Barbuda dating back to 1928. The period March to May 2026 ranks as the tenth driest such period on record, while January to May 2026 currently stands as the thirteenth driest on record. These statistics are not merely historical rankings; they are indicators of increasing pressure on our nation's water resources, ecosystems, food production systems, and communities.

For Antigua and Barbuda, drought is not an occasional inconvenience but a recurring development challenge. Our limited freshwater resources, highly variable rainfall, and dependence on climate-sensitive sectors have historically made water security one of our most pressing national concerns. From prolonged droughts that strained reservoirs and groundwater supplies to the increasing reliance on desalinated water, our history has repeatedly demonstrated the vulnerability of our nation to water scarcity.

Climate change is expected to exacerbate these challenges through rising temperatures, increased evaporation rates, more erratic rainfall patterns, and potentially more frequent and intense drought episodes. Together, these factors increase the risk of land degradation and create conditions that can accelerate desertification processes, particularly when combined with unsustainable land-use practices.

The impacts of drought extend far beyond water availability. Prolonged dry conditions can reduce agricultural productivity, increase food insecurity, diminish livestock health, heighten wildfire risk, stress natural ecosystems, reduce biodiversity, increase operational costs for businesses and households, and place additional burdens on public health and critical infrastructure. Drought affects every sector of society and therefore requires a coordinated national response.

In addressing these challenges, the Antigua and Barbuda Meteorological Service (ABMS) plays a critical role through the provision of weather, climate, hydrological, and drought-monitoring services. By continuously monitoring rainfall deficits, drought indicators, seasonal climate drivers, and long-range climate forecasts, the ABMS provides the scientific information necessary for informed decision-making and proactive risk management.

These services support water resource management, agriculture, disaster risk reduction, environmental protection, public health planning, and national development. Through drought monitoring, seasonal forecasting, climate outlooks, impact-based advisories, and early warnings, the ABMS helps ensure that individuals, communities, businesses, and policymakers have the information necessary to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to emerging climate risks. Early warning and climate services remain among the most effective tools available for reducing drought impacts and building national resilience.

A key component of Antigua and Barbuda's drought resilience efforts is the National Climate Outlook Forum (NCOF), convened by the Antigua and Barbuda Meteorological Service. The NCOF serves as a national platform for the dissemination and discussion of climate information, bringing together government agencies, water managers, farmers, disaster managers, health officials, businesses, researchers, development partners, and other stakeholders.

Through the Forum, seasonal climate forecasts, drought outlooks, and other climate products are translated into practical information that supports planning and decision-making. The NCOF facilitates dialogue between climate information providers and users, helping stakeholders understand emerging risks, identify vulnerabilities, and develop appropriate preparedness and response measures. In doing so, it strengthens collaboration across sectors and fosters a culture of proactive risk management rather than reactive crisis response.

As drought conditions worsen and climate variability increases, the importance of the NCOF continues to grow. It provides a critical mechanism for ensuring that climate information reaches those who need it most and supports Antigua and Barbuda's commitment to the United Nations Early Warnings for All initiative by promoting anticipatory action before hazards escalate into disasters.

Unlike hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes, drought is a slow-onset hazard. It develops gradually, often over months, and its impacts may not be immediately visible. Yet drought can be every bit as destructive, affecting water supplies, food production, ecosystems, livelihoods, and economic activity. The slow development of drought provides an opportunity for preparedness and early

action, making climate information, early warning systems, and proactive planning essential tools for reducing risk and safeguarding communities.

While government agencies and institutions have important responsibilities, building resilience to drought requires action from all of us.

As a nation, we must continue investing in water security by expanding water storage capacity, improving water-use efficiency, reducing losses within distribution systems, strengthening watershed management, promoting rainwater harvesting, supporting climate-smart agriculture, restoring degraded lands, and protecting forests, wetlands, and other ecosystems that help conserve water, maintain healthy soils, and reduce the risk of land degradation.

At the household and community levels, every citizen can contribute by conserving water, repairing leaks promptly, harvesting rainwater where possible, adopting water-efficient practices, supporting tree planting and land restoration initiatives, reducing activities that increase wildfire risk, and remaining informed through official weather and climate updates. Small actions taken collectively can have a significant impact on strengthening national resilience during periods of drought.

The choices we make today will determine how effectively we withstand the dry months ahead. World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought reminds us that healthy land and secure water resources are fundamental to sustainable development, economic prosperity, environmental stewardship, and human well-being. It also reminds us that combating drought and preventing land degradation are not responsibilities for governments alone; they require the active participation of every sector and every citizen.

As Antigua and Barbuda confronts what may become one of the more significant drought episodes in recent years, let us reaffirm our commitment to sustainable land management, responsible water use, climate-informed decision-making, and collective action. By working together, guided by science and informed by early warning systems, we can reduce the impacts of drought, strengthen our resilience, safeguard our natural resources, and build a more secure and sustainable future for present and future generations.

On this World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, let us recognize that resilience begins long before a crisis reaches its peak. Through vigilance, preparedness, cooperation, and stewardship of our precious land and water resources, Antigua and Barbuda can meet the challenges ahead and emerge stronger, more resilient, and better prepared for a changing climate.

Warm regards,

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