

**STATEMENT BY THE SINGAPORE CIVIL DEFENCE FORCE
AT THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON DISASTER REDUCTION
IN KOBE, JAPAN, 18 - 22 JANUARY 2005**

Mr Chairperson,

Distinguished delegates,

On behalf of the Singapore delegation, I would like to join the distinguished delegates here to thank the Government of Japan for hosting the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in this beautiful city of Kobe.

2. The aim of this World Conference is to build upon the findings of the review of the implementation of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action of 1994, in particular in defining the challenges, critical needs and opportunities in disaster reduction initiatives worldwide. Disaster impacts have increased over the years, and as the destruction caused by the recent tsunami that struck on 26 December 2004 demonstrates, disasters are a major obstacle to development. Overnight, a devastating disaster can wipe out years of development and reduce people to a state of abject

poverty. It is therefore imperative that the world finds ways to reduce the risks of disasters and to alleviate the impact of disasters on development.

3. Distinguished delegates would also recall the United Nations Millennium Declaration of 2001 where one of the aims is to intensify our collective efforts to reduce the number and effects of natural and man-made disasters. The spirit of this aim is for all nations to contribute collectively and to stay focused on this development goal for the long haul. The recent tsunami tragedy reminds us once again that the effects of a large-scale disaster can be very long-drawn. While the world swiftly mobilised rescue and relief efforts for the tsunami affected countries, we must ensure that the world sustains focus on rebuilding the lives of the communities which have been affected, long after they no longer make it to the top news.

4. Peoples affected by disasters require not just sustained relief and re-building efforts. They need the world's assistance to put them on to a sustainable path of development, to be able to completely recover from a disaster. This World Conference is therefore also an important platform to remind the world of the urgency to focus on the vulnerable, and to take into account community needs in disaster risk reduction, rebuilding and sustainable development.

5. The world needs no further reminders about the urgency with which we should view our work here. The tsunami that struck regional countries in the morning of 26 December 2004 sends a patently clear signal. Within hours, giant tidal waves had swept across vast areas in Asia, leaving behind massive destruction of an unprecedented scale. At last count, the death toll has gone beyond 160,000.

6. The world has responded most admirably to the recent tsunami tragedy. More than US\$700 million have been pledged, amounting to 70 per cent of the UN's Flash Appeal. Singapore is a small country and our contribution of military and civil defence personnel and resources and pledge of US\$15 million will only be a drop in the ocean. Nevertheless, we will continue to offer support in these times of need and contribute in a meaningful way.

7. The scale of the tsunami disaster is unprecedented in living memory. We are naturally seized with the enormity of the disaster. Yet, in managing its devastating aftermath, let us not forget our vulnerabilities to the other destructive forces that nature can unleash. Every year, natural disasters and related hazards affect vast regions such as Africa, Asia and

the Americas. Let us learn from the recent tragedy, and push on with urgency to reduce the risks of disasters and the damage to development.

Thank you.

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