

Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop on School Education and Disaster Risk Reduction,
8-10 October 2007, UNCC, Bangkok.

Sheldon Shaeffer, Director, UNESCO Bangkok

Opening Address:

On behalf of UNESCO, it is my great pleasure to welcome all of you to the Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop on School Education and Disaster Risk Reduction. This is an initiative developed by the Educational Task Force, comprised of UNISDR, UNICEF and UNESCO, as a first step to demonstrate the long term commitment of the partnership to facilitate the integration of disaster risk reduction into the education sector. I am pleased to note that this collaborative effort will be a milestone to a longer-term regional strategy that aims at raising awareness on the need to integrate disaster risk reduction and school safety construction programmes as part of education curricular.

This will give opportunity for real dialogue on Education for Natural Disaster Preparedness in the context of Education for Sustainable Development between practitioners, curriculum developers and policy makers from a larger number of countries throughout the region.

In line with the Hyogo Framework for Action, which promotes “the integration of disaster risk reduction as an intrinsic element of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development”, ESD will be employed as a framework to facilitate and enhance holistic consideration of the interrelations between society, the economy, the environment and culture.

UNESCO Bangkok is currently working on an assessment of curriculum in selected countries in the region in close consultation with policy makers and will present recommendations to stakeholders such as teachers, teacher trainers and other relevant practitioners to act as a guide for integrating education for natural disaster preparedness into school curricula. The development of the document will require dialogue with practitioners and stakeholders who have been closely consulted throughout the preparatory stage.

The Asia-Pacific Regional Workshop on School Education and Disaster Risk Reduction

will promote non-formal education activities, highlight the role and contribution of local communities in the educational process, increase the recognition of indigenous/traditional knowledge, and identify good practices in education for natural disaster preparedness. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome all of you as a member of this remarkable and stimulating endeavor.

UNESCO has been taking initiatives on education for disaster risk reduction. In the 4th World Water Forum held at the Centro Banamex convention center in Mexico City in March last year, we co-hosted a session on “Adopting Integrated Flood Management within Integrated Water Resources Management”, focusing on Concept of the International Flood Initiative, with the International Centre for Water Hazard and Risk Management (ICHARM) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). More than 10,000 people from all over the world participated in the event. Education for Natural Disaster Preparedness is approached holistically by UNESCO and in this region. We work inter-sectorally within our mandates and particularly closely with our Regional Bureau for Science in Jakarta. Many of you may also be aware of work undertaken by the Section for Disaster Reduction in UNESCO HQ Paris in assembling teaching and awareness materials in the forms of books, brochures, games, posters, films currently being electronically catalogues in order to be used as reference materials. UNESCO is hoping to further work collaborate and provide information for the UNISDR Prevention Web in order to test and improve on these educational materials.

It is on this note, with an eye to the future, that the regional representatives assembled here today will take a crucial role in integrating disaster risk reduction into school curricula in accordance with national context and priorities. The challenges that lie ahead will be considerable as we again work collectively to ensure coordination of reporting and political commitment in the Asia-Pacific region. Indeed, it is foreseen that this activity will become more and more central as we join hands with more and more partners, such as UN Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD), Asian Disaster Reduction Center, Japan (ADRC), and ASEAN.

On behalf of UNESCO Bangkok, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all of you who have offered cooperation to make this meeting to be successful including our major partners the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, Japanese Funds-in-Trust for UNESCO, UNICEF, ADPC and UNESCAP in co-organizing this event.

I hope all of you will actively participate in discussion and your stay in Bangkok will be both a pleasant and productive one. Thankyou