

Summary Record of
The Fifth International Conference on Disaster Risk Management
(Astana: 10-11 November, 2010)

The Fifth ECO International Conference on Disaster Risk Management was organized jointly by the Ministry for Emergency Situations of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR). Financial support for the Conference was also provided by the German Government and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Kazakhstan. The Conference was attended by delegates from the Islamic State of Afghanistan, the Azerbaijan Republic, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan. An active part in the conference was taken by representatives of regional experts and specialists, representative of academic and research institutions of the ECO region, international/regional organizations and UN agencies such as UNISDR, UNICEF, UNDP, WHO, American Red Cross, and others.

The main objective of the conference was to review achievements and assess the current level of national investments in disaster risk reduction in general and in school and hospital safety in particular; and to estimate gaps and requirements for additional resources for school and hospital safety assessment. The conference presented an excellent opportunity for participating government representatives and experts to discuss the schools and hospitals safety issues among a wider group of stakeholders representing a region with similar hazards and capacities. The conference helped promote the sense of urgency and realization of the importance of safety and resilience of public infrastructure among the governments of the organization. Such understanding would help inclusion of school safety in the list of priorities in the policies and strategies of the countries of ECO.

The following themes were discussed in the Conference:

- Regional launch of the Global Campaign “Making Cities Resilient” and “One Million Safe Schools and Hospitals Initiative”
- Current initiatives/activities on promoting school and hospital safety in ECO region
- Safer Cities and Seismic Risk Reduction, and
- The role of National Platforms in reducing seismic risk

A brief summary record of different sessions of the Conference is as follows:

Day One

Inaugural Session:

The Conference proceedings were opened by **His Excellency Minister of Emergency Situations Vladimir Bozhko** who welcomed all the delegates on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

His Excellency Ambassador Hassan Taherian, ECO Deputy Secretary General stated that ECO region is one of the most



disaster-prone regions of the world and the issue of natural disasters has become more relevant to the ECO region than any other regions. Further he added, while referring the recent devastating flood in Pakistan which caused displacement of the nearly twenty million people in this country, that in the ECO region, every year natural hazards destroy economic and social infrastructure, damage environment and ecology and also cause heavy damage to the economic development. He mentioned that the recent flood in Pakistan demonstrates potential threats and considerable dimensions of disasters for the countries of the region.

UN Resident Coordinator a.i. for Kazakhstan Ms. Hanaa Singer expressed her gratitude to the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan for hosting the Conference and in particular the Ministry of Emergency Situations for providing excellent organizational and logistical support. Being also Representative of UNICEF in Kazakhstan, Ms. Singer commended the fact that the subject of school safety is given special attention at the conference.

The Opening Session was followed by a key-note speech of **Special Representative to Secretary General on disaster risk reduction Ms. Margareta Wahlstrom**. Ms. Wahlstrom called the conference a shining example of the Government's and the region's commitment to reducing the impact of disasters through preventive measures and developing capacities for disaster preparedness and response. She made a special reference to the Hyogo Framework for Action as a 10-year agenda set in place in 2005 which serves a powerful tool and a useful framework for governments and major UN agencies and civil society organizations in reducing disaster risk and supporting the establishment of international, regional and national policies and legislation.

First Session

The first session included introduction of the Conference goals and objectives, a statement on behalf of the ECO secretariat and member-states.

Ms. Goulsara Pulatova, Head of UNISDR Sub-Regional Office for Central Asia and Caucasus reminded that the key objective facing all countries of ECO region is to *accelerate*

implementation of HFA to halve the loss of lives from disasters by 2015. This can be achieved, among other, through *increased investments, safer schools and hospitals and adapting to climate related risk*. This to a great extent influenced the identification of the main Conference goal, namely, to review achievements and assess the current level of national investments in disaster risk reduction in general and in school and hospital safety in particular; and to estimate gaps and requirements for additional resources for school and hospital safety assessment.

Mr. S. Taheri Shemirani, Officer In-charge, responsible for Disaster Risk Management at ECO briefed the Conference on the activities regarding implementations of the recommendations on disaster risk management (such as allocating budget for preparedness and relief, participation member states' experts from the planning and budget sections in the relevant ECO meetings, encouraging member states for the accelerated implementation of the Hyogo Framework Action and considering a strategy for regional cooperation on disaster risk management may be prepared and circulated to Member States, which) adopted by the Fourth ECO Conference on the subject held in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, in 2009.

Statements by ECO Member States:

Brief statements were also made by Heads of delegations of Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan who elaborated on the status of respective national investments in disaster risk reduction. A special focus in these presentations was made on school and hospital safety. Despite the different level of political stability and economic development of ECO countries, it was obvious that national governments pay increased attention to safety of key social facilities. This was demonstrated by a compelling example of Uzbekistan: from 2004 to 2009, this country finalized physical assessment and retrofitting and reconstruction of all school buildings and has started a similar assessment of all medical facilities. Increased investment in school safety was also demonstrated by Azerbaijan delegation which only proves that safety and wellbeing of children is indeed a priority for this country. Indeed, it sounded as a revelation that despite the hardships faced by such country as Afghanistan school safety is among priorities for the national government.

Second Session

The Second Session was moderated by Mr. Taheri Shemirani, ECO Secretariat Legal Advisor and started with the Regional Launch of the Global Campaign for 2010-2011 – “Making Cities Resilient”. The global launch of the Campaign took place in May 2010 in Bonn, Germany. Since then, UNISDR takes every opportunity to attract attention to the issue of city safety through special events. The 5th ECO Conference provided an opportunity for a launch in ECO region comprising ten countries - Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The key presentation was made by Ms. **Christel Rose, Head of ROSCU**, from UNISDR secretariat in Geneva. It contained information on the Global Campaign and called upon cities and towns of the region to join the campaign in one of the three capacities – Champion, Model City or Participant. As of today, only Dushanbe, the capital city of Tajikistan, and Kabul in Afghanistan formally joined the campaign.

This presentation was followed by a few examples of good practices:

Dr. Sobit Negmatullaev, Director of the Geophysical Survey of Tajikistan, made a presentation on “Reducing Seismic Risk of Urban Areas: Example of Dushanbe”. Tajikistan is one of the most earthquake-prone countries in the region and a devastating earthquake threatens its capital city any day now (with the last catastrophic earthquake in the area in 1907). Dr. Negmatullaev presented the outcomes of the recent project¹ that developed 16 scenarios of a strong earthquake in Dushanbe, taking into account both technical specifications and social factors. Judging by the audience response and questions, this experience is worth disseminating in the region.

This was followed by “Big Cities of Kyrgyz Republic and Their Seismic Safety” presented by **Director of the Institute of Seismology Dr. Kanatbek Abdrahmatov**. It was clear from this presentation that despite the hard times faced by science and scientists in Kyrgyzstan in the past few years, the expertise is still strong. There is sufficient data and expertise in place to follow-up with the recommendations voiced in the presentation. However, the lack of funding and the absence task-oriented program still put lives of people at stake.

The last but not least presentation of the session was devoted to “Seismic Risk Assessment of the City of Almaty”. This presentation was made by **Deputy Mayor of Almaty Mr. Maulen Mukashev**. The presentation covered the recent project on the city assessment implemented in cooperation with, and support of JICA. Almaty is in the list of major cities in Central Asia prone to a catastrophic earthquake. Taking into account the earthquake cycle in this area (80-130 years) and the fact that the last devastating earthquake in Almaty occurred in 1911, immediate measures are required to provide safety of the city population.

Third Session

The Third Session was devoted specifically to the issue of school safety and good practices from the ECO region as well as the current problems and ways of their solution.

The first presentation was made by **Professor Shamil Hakimov, Head of Construction Department of UZLITTI, Uzbekistan**. He presented the national program of the Government of Uzbekistan for 2004-2009 on ensuring safety of schools. The presentation outlined, among other things, the economic aspect of retrofitting schools: the cost of retrofitting would amount to 5%-14% of the cost of the new construction of a similar facility. The government of Uzbekistan initiated and funded assessment of 10,000 school buildings in the country, and recommended 7% of them for immediate demolition; 27% for reconstruction and retrofitting; 42% for capital repair; and 24% did not require improvement. By 2009, 90% of the plan for retrofitting was implemented.

The methodology, technologies and recommendations were developed for Uzbekistan, yet can be applied for any country of Central Asia, since most of functioning schools were built by standard design and norms in the former USSR. It is also worth mentioning that a similar national

¹ The project in question was implemented in Tajikistan by UNDP DRMP together with the NGO “PMP International” under DIPECHO V, 2009.

program has been planned by Uzbekistan with regard to safety of hospitals and other medical facilities.

The next presentation made by **President of FOVGAL Association, Professor Habib Odjagov** from Azerbaijan. His presentation covered “Issues of disaster prevention and ensuring of school safety in Azerbaijan Republic. Azerbaijan is also located in one of the most disaster-prone areas of the world. Besides, according to Professor Odjagov, the country is prone to technological hazards caused by an expanding integration of new technologies associated with the use of dangerous explosive and toxic materials. At the same time, national investments in providing school safety have substantially increased in the past few years since 2005 and a new Government Program on capital repair and construction of new schools have been adopted for 2008-2012.

Presentation made by representative of **Afghanistan, Mr. Janaqa Haidari, ANDMA**, raised a lot of interest and appreciation of the participants. After briefing the audience on the most serious natural hazards and those caused by the current situation in the country (such as suicide bombing) Mr. Haidari focused on the situation with education in general and the issue of school safety in various part of the country. From 1954 to 2010, the country experienced 118 large-scale disasters, with a total number of persons killed estimated at 21,346 and affected persons estimated at 10,989,211 - most of them were children and women. At present, about 7 million students are enrolled the schools and 37% of them or 2.5 millions are girls. At the same time, approximately 42% or five million of the estimated 12 million school-aged children and youth do not have access to education.

The presentation made by ANDMA representative once again confirmed that it is sometimes not easy to differentiate between problems caused by natural hazards, poverty and political and social issues and different approaches may be needed to improve the situation.

One of the proposed approaches to ensuring safety of school children and teachers was presented by **Mr. Raimbek Sissemaliev, Monitoring and Evaluation Office, UNICEF, Kazakhstan**. His presentation viewed school-safety from the UNICEF perspective. He stated that schools should be a safe haven for children but we all have seen schools that have turned into devil trap for children. Mr. Sissemaliev made reference to previous disasters that affected schools during earthquakes in China and Pakistan and other countries which killed thousands of children and destroyed thousands of classrooms. The speaker emphasized the need for school-safety because it has a number of consequences including, physical, educational, economic and psychological impacts. On the other hand, it is also most important to build the culture of safety from school age and even earlier. This is one of UNICEF objectives in the region under the current DIPECHO project which is focused on the need to include the subject of Disaster Risk Reduction into school curriculum.

Day Two

The second day deliberations were opened by Minister Vladimir Bozhko who made an overview of Day One findings and proceedings.

Fourth Session

The Fourth Session was devoted to the issue of hospital safety, good practices and lessons learned. This session was chaired by **Dr. Marija Kisman, WHO Head of Office in Astana.**

The session started with the video “**Hospitals Safe from Disasters**” prepared by the Pan American Health Organization. The video elaborated on the current efforts undertaken by several countries of the Caribbean Region to ensure safety of hospitals during and after disasters. The video provided a compelling evidence of cost-effectiveness of the investments in hospital renovation and reconstruction that might cost 15% of the initial construction expenses compared to 100% loss in case of its major damage. What is more important, inability of national governments to protect its people against disasters may result in a political and social instability.

The video was followed by a substantive presentation made by **Dr. Marija Kisman** on the importance of ensuring the safety of hospitals and other medical facilities under the present conditions and with the consideration of disaster risks and climate change. Starting from 2008, when the second Global Campaign was announced on Hospitals Safe from Disasters, WHO has developed specific Guidelines for the assessment of medical facilities prior to their retrofitting and/or reconstruction. This methodology has been successfully used in several countries of the region, such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and is worth disseminating and using in other countries of the bigger ECO region.

The Republic of Uzbekistan, following its successful implementation of the national program on school safety assessment and reconstruction, started a nation-wide assessment of hospitals. This was mentioned in the presentation of **Director of NGO HAYOT from Uzbekistan Mr. Khusan Tursunov.** In particular, his presentation focused on the “Level of education of school and hospital personnel in disaster risk reduction as a factor of their enhanced resilience”. Mr. Tursunov informed the audience of the training events organized by his NGO in collaboration with the Ministry of Health of Uzbekistan and UNISDR sub-regional office in Central Asia for Chief Physicians and emergency personnel of the major hospitals in Tashkent. Of special interest was his presentation of audio-visual aids used for training of school students and teachers. Some of these materials have been adopted and translated into other national languages of CA and have been used for community awareness, including TV channels.

Fifth Session

The Fifth Session devoted to the “Role of National Platforms in Reducing Seismic Risk in the Region” raised a lot of interest among the conference delegates in view of the growing awareness of the role and opportunities provided by a well-functioning national platform in any given country. The presentation made by **Mr. Abdurahim Muhidov, HFA Coordinator for the**

CAC region (UNISDR), reminded participants that a National Platform is a national mechanism for coordination and policy guidance on disaster risk reduction. Its multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary composition is especially viable in relation to ensuring school and hospital safety as it allows for (i) Periodic comprehensive assessment of safety of buildings, facilities and infrastructure; (ii) Retrofitting and reconstruction; (iii) Use of modern technologies and materials; and (iv) Factor of safety in design, construction, and integration in environment.

On the other note, the establishment of the Central Asian coordination Center for Disaster Response and Disaster Risk Reduction in Almaty provides the ground for the functioning Regional Platform in Central Asian region and beyond. The history and the current status of the CA Center were presented by the **Ministry of Emergency Situations of Kazakhstan**. The initiative of the Government of Kazakhstan first expressed back in 2003 eventually found support among UN agencies, such as OCHA, UNISDR and UNDP and in October 2010, an Agreement was signed between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on the establishment of the Center. Among its many tasks, disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation will receive due attention: hopefully, the programs initiated by the Center in the near future will take into account the trans-boundary nature of natural hazards in the region. Seismic risk reduction is one of the key spheres of the proposed interventions.

The newly established CA Center for DR & DRR enjoys full support on part of the European Community through DIPECHO VI project implemented by UNDP Kazakhstan. Chief Technical Advisor of DIPECHO VI (UNDP) Mr. Alexander Kravchuk made a presentation on “Enhancing the DRR Capacities in Central Asia”. To achieve this goal, the project envisages, in the first place:

- Development and enhancing national disaster management and prevention systems in Central Asian countries;
- Providing coordinated preparedness and planning of response measures, including services and resources of member-countries and partners;
- Development of state-of-the-art information and communication systems for data collection and analysis;
- Vulnerability and risk assessment
- Expanded cooperation with international partners.

Regional cooperation has become the subject of the next presentation prepared made by **Mr. Augustine Gill, Regional Representative of American Red Cross in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and Pakistan**. The title of Mr. Gill’s presentation was self-explanatory – “Prepare Central Asia – urban earthquake preparedness initiative in partnership with Red Crescent Societies of Central Asia”. It is quite in line with the global mission of the ARC - Help vulnerable people and communities around the world *prepare for, respond to, and recover from natural disasters, humanitarian crises, and health emergencies*, through mobilizing the power of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. Of special interest was the regional project of ARC aimed at reducing seismic risk for several major cities of the region, most prone

to the earthquake hazard. This list starts with Almaty and is followed by Bishkek, Ashgabat, Tashkent, Dushanbe, and Lahore/Karachi. The ARC initiative deserves commendation and support of all partners, starting with national governments and National Red Crescent Societies, and including UNISDR and other UN agencies, local and international stakeholders.

Closing Session

The closing session chaired by **His Excellency Ambassador Hassan Taherian, ECO Deputy Secretary General** started with the general discussion of the Conference recommendations and follow-up actions. Ambassador Taherian made a summary of the two day fruitful discussions and shared his thoughts on the most urgent and feasible recommendations and next steps to be taken by ECO member-states governments individually and in cooperation with neighboring countries and international organizations. He then opened the floor to the official delegations and other conference participants to provide their comments and feedback to the proposed actions and make their own input. The summary of recommendations shared at this closing session, including those received from the conference participants in writing is provided below.

Closing remarks were made by **Special Representative to Secretary General on disaster risk reduction Ms. Margareta Wahlstrom** and **His Excellency Minister of Emergency Situations Vladimir Bozhko**.

The Conference was concluded with a vote of thanks to the Ministry for Emergency Situations of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) for organizing the Conference in a smooth and efficient manner.

5th ECO International DRM Conference Recommendations

Towards the end of the Conference, the participants agreed on the following set of Recommendations addressed both to the national governments of ECO member-countries, as well as to UN agencies, international organizations, national and international NGOs, and donor community:

1. Following the regional launch of the Global Campaign “Making Cities Resilient” and “One Million



Safe Schools and Hospitals Initiative”, ECO member-countries are encouraged to join the Campaign and include their vulnerable cities and towns in one of the three capacities: Champions, Model Cities or Participants.

2. Use good practices and experiences presented at the Conference, in particular, those of Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan, to further promote national investments in school and hospital safety.

3. Increase the role of National Platforms in promoting and ensuring school and hospital safety. It is recommended that all school buildings in ECO member-countries are assessed by the end of 2011 and are retrofitted and/or reconstructed by the end of 2015.

4. Increase the role of National Platforms in reducing disaster risk and climate change adaptation. In this regard, special attention should be given to protection against landslides and debris flows, outburst of dam and glacial lakes – all of which are an issue in the high mountain areas of the region.

5. Increase regional cooperation and coordination providing support to, and making use of, the newly established Central Asian Center for Disaster Response and Risk Reduction in Almaty, Kazakhstan.

6. Regular meetings of the regional Expert Group represented at the Conference by individual specialists from the countries of the region. It is highly recommended to use the expertise of this unique resource in tackling the issues of disaster risk reduction, building the culture of safety and awareness raising in the region. This Expert Group may form an excellent additional resource for the CA Center for DR&DRR in Kazakhstan.

7. It is recommended to develop a set of Guidelines with specific indicators for the assessment of the status of resilience of cities and towns to disasters. Such Guidelines should take into account all potential hazards characteristic of the particular region and should be easily adapted to specific country conditions.

8. Building codes need to be enforced in all earthquake prone cities in Central Asia.

9. Government support is required to carry out public campaigns in CA cities. This support could be in the form of authorizing city governments to facilitate free access to public parks, concert halls, auditoriums, sports stadiums for big public events and use of media (TV, radio and press) by providing free space for public messaging. The governments should be encouraged to not be afraid of sharing pertinent information about earthquake preparedness with their citizens as time is running out to prepare them against potential risks.

10. It is recommended to increase stocks and warehouse space in Central Asian cities to prepare for eventual big earthquake. This should be the priority of all Central Asian governments and information should be made public about the quantity of stocks available in government warehouses to estimate for future needs. One of the ways to do it is to involve the CA Center for DR&DRR.

11. Progress in the implementation of the HFA and DRR by member-countries should be encouraged by donors through allocation of additional funds for disaster risk reduction activities.

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