

**Assises Nationales des Risques Naturels
Bordeaux, France
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**Address by Margareta Wahlström,
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for Disaster Risk Reduction**

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Excellency, Ms. Kosciusko-Morizet, Minister for Environment, Sustainable Development, Transport and Housing, Mr. Orsenna, Distinguished Representatives, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to have been invited to share the United Nations' perspective on risk, risk management and risk reduction on the occasion of the important discussions that the "Assises Nationales des Risques Naturels" represent in the French national perspective on risk agenda. I would like to congratulate the *Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development, Transport & Housing* and the *National Institute for Research in Science and Technology for The Environment and Agriculture* for organizing this important conference that aims at playing a crucial role in promoting a culture of risks in France. I can foresee that it will further the understanding of disaster risk reduction as a collective effort which involves all levels of society and individual behaviours, and also inspire other countries to offer similar events to their communities.

Bringing together a wide range of diverse stakeholders involved in disaster risk reduction is a unique opportunity to discuss how to better address together disaster risk. It is also the occasion to identify effective risk reduction measures in response to the emerging risks posed by climate

variability and the consequences on the severity and frequency of climatological and meteorological hazards.

1. Context

2011 was a new record year in disaster losses world-wide. The reinsurance company Munich Re recorded 380b USD of global economic losses (2/3 higher than in 2005, the previous record). The Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction produced in 2011 indicates that vulnerability to hazards is very high and rapidly increasing in Europe and overall in developed countries, with adverse impacts on their economy. The report points out that economic loss risk is continuing to increase also in wealthier countries. Europe, as a region, is exposed to a wide range of natural hazards such as storms, droughts, heat waves, floods, earthquakes, avalanches and landslides which continuously cause human and economic losses and as you know well, France is one of the countries heavily affected. Europe saw in 2010 the biggest increase in disaster occurrence (+ 18.2%), compared to the decade's averages.

Despite the French and European wealth of expertise, knowledge and know-how in climate risk modelling and disaster risk management, Europe accounted for 14.3% of 2010 global reported economic losses due to disasters, and most of the damages were due to climatological and hydrometeorological events. So what is the main challenge we are facing?

To turn our knowledge into practical application.

2. The Hyogo Framework for Action and the 'all-of-society' approach

Disaster risks cannot be reduced and managed without the cooperation and engagement of all institutions and parts of society. This conference recognizes that coordinated action across stakeholders in

reducing disaster risk and as points out its title[« *Dépasser les contradictions pour mieux agir ensemble* »] is a foundation stone to achieve this.

The objective of this conference, the question of partnerships, is aligned with goals set by the Hyogo Framework for Action “Building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters 2005-2015” (HFA) endorsed by the UN General Assembly. This framework is the main international agreed blueprint on disaster reduction action and guides action for building and strengthening the resilience of nations and communities. A fundamental of this framework is that it requires all parts of society to work together to achieve a more resilient community.

The HFA offers a series of practical ‘things to do’ that have been proven to reduce risk and impact. The voluntary cooperation in wide and diverse networks that this has generated has led to good progress. In early 2011, a mid-term review of the HFA was done to hear from the ‘users’ if the HFA is useful, what progress had been made, as well as what the challenges and the constraints are. Much positive was said and noted, not least the value of cooperation, but the two most significant challenges were identified to be: 1) the difficulties and obstacles to share and have easy access to information and knowledge, and, 2) the quality and design of institutions and this includes the challenge of coordination within and among institutions and their link with other key stakeholders, including private sector, civil society and science. These are strategic issues that require a high level of authority to become an ‘all-of-society’ approach.

3. The French experience

France has established a National Platform for disaster risk reduction, led by the Ministry of Ecology, Sustainable Development, Transport & Housing. The French National Platform is an example of multi-stakeholder

mechanisms. It is through this coordination among different layers of governments, from the central to the local level, and different actors from public institutions, NGOs and private sector, that cost-effective interventions can be planned and implemented through this, experiences can be shared across different organizations and stakeholders, and lessons learned can be efficiently used for future policies and programmes.

Let me take this opportunity to congratulate France for the efforts made to implement disaster risk reduction nationally. As the HFA progress report 2009-2011 for France highlighted, already at the end of 2009, 7,700 municipalities in hazard prone areas developed local plans for disaster prevention and 4,000 more municipalities were engaging in this exercise. France has also progressed in strengthening its urban planning codes which consider disaster prevention and risk reduction as key element and assured that these codes comply with certified quality control mechanisms.

In 2010, the extra-tropical cyclone Xynthia caused the death of 47 individuals and economic losses for 4.2 billion US dollars. France did a remarkable job of mainstreaming the lessons learnt from Xynthia into the national plans for disaster management and plans for infrastructure and for flood protection.

Learning from the past to build a safer future is essential and I want to commend France for its strategy of commemorations of key French disaster events. Several major advocacy events have taken place over the past decade to commemorate the Loire River flood and more recently the Xynthia storm and the devastating major 1911 Paris floods. These are powerful tools to educate younger generations on disasters impacts and disaster risk reduction.

Such elements of informal education complement the legal efforts taken by the French Government to make disaster risk reduction Education a priority in the education agenda, with new curriculum and risk reduction

plans. The latter emerged from a joint partnership between key line Ministries, namely the French Ministry of Ecology and Sustainable Development, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Interior and should be encouraged for replication in Europe and worldwide as a model of internal cooperation and coordination in support of disaster risk reduction.

Building on successful initiatives undertaken by the French Government such as the nomination of school students as "Risk Ambassadors" and the innovative partnership they forged with local municipalities in promoting disaster risk reduction implementation at the local level, I would like to invite France to inspire Europe in promoting disaster risk reduction as a citizenship duty ("devoir citoyen").

4. Critical partners

Cities

Disaster risk has become an acute and increasingly urban challenge. Globally, poorly planned urban environments, weak urban governance, an old and ageing and fragile physical infrastructure and gaps in basic services, rapid growth have increased pressure on the urban environment and thus also exposure to disaster risk. Cities are of course the major engines of economic opportunity, education, cultural life and urban identity is important. The need for maintenance and upkeep of these cities are crucial safety measures for their citizens. Increasing resources towards prevention measures means saving costs from future disasters.

UNISDR launched the "*Making Cities Resilient- My city is getting ready!*" campaign in 2010 with the objective to actively enrol city leaders, local governments and city councils through cooperation as an integral and active part of building the resilience of their urban communities. By today, 962 cities have globally joined the campaign and 384 of them are European cities. France does not have yet any city signed up. I do hope that soon,

French mayors and local governments will join our campaign and commit to its ten essential action points aimed at building a culture of safety and risk prevention among their communities. Local interventions are the foundations of disaster risk reduction and cities threaded by recurrent disasters such as floods, experienced in 2009 and 2010 by Bordeaux, shall be in the frontline of disaster prevention and risk reduction projects at the local level.

French Overseas Departments and Territories also represent a potential for disaster risk reduction cooperation. I am particularly encouraged to see the growing interest expressed by local authorities there to learn and be involved in disaster risk reduction and the proactive engagement demonstrated by some Mayors and Parliamentarians to mobilize cooperation in support of disaster risk reduction implementation at the local level. Closer links should be established with DOM-TOMs' Mayors Associations, in particular in the Caribbean where cooperation links already exist with major partners such as the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Association (CDEMA) and the Caribbean Observatory for Environmental Risk Prevention and could lead to a major regional political movement and mobilization for disaster risk reduction.

Public-private partnerships

From the French HFA report – and I would like to thank France for its contribution to the HFA Monitor - another key element for an effective reduction of disasters risks emerged: the need to build public-private partnerships. In France, insurance products for disasters are available in the household and small-medium enterprise market. In recent years, private French companies have started to develop business continuity plan for mitigating the economic risks of business disruption in case of disasters.

On the average 15% of investments in disaster risk reduction in a given country is public investment. The balance is private. Without the full engagement of private and business sectors, resilience cannot be achieved. Strengthened partnerships among the private and public sector are powerful opportunities that substantively enhance global efforts to reduce risks, build resilience and rebuild with resilience as well as safeguard precious economic gains.

In this context, I would like to stress the importance of keep improving the way data losses are record and accounted, including small scale and localised disasters. Sound data are critical to take decisions concerning development planning and investments.

Science involvement

I welcome the presence here today of the scientific community who has a very practical role to play as the application of existing natural and applied science is a cornerstone of our collective efforts to reduce risk and social, economic, and political impacts of natural hazards. In May 2011, at the Third Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, the provision of science-based climate-related information through the Global Framework for Climate Services was identified as a critical follow-up action. The UNISDR Science and Technical Committee has elaborated an action plan to ensure science and technology contribution to efforts to reduce disaster risk.

4. Regional and international cooperation

France practice can in many ways be considered as a model and be shared with others. At the regional and international level, France has actively participated to the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction and has been in the front line highlighting how disaster risk reduction measures

contributes to national and regional strategies addressing climate change. Through the European Commission, France contributed to the development of a Communitarian approach to disaster risk management.

The years ahead offer critical opportunities to build and above all realize the culture of risks. I look forward to the renewed commitment of France this year and in the upcoming years towards promoting nationally and internationally disaster risk reduction as integral part of sustainable development policies and actions.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development which will take place in Rio de Janeiro this year, known also as Rio+20, will be an important venue. It is critical that development takes risk reduction as a significant function to ensure sustainability to development plans. France has taken important steps in this direction. I hope France will make its voice heard in the international arena to ensure that the conference's outcome contribute to a culture and practice of resilience to disaster.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I very much look forward to the outcomes of this conference. Your work will contribute to maintaining and increasing the momentum and focus on climate and disaster risks as threats to development and, most importantly, how to address these challenges. I wish you a productive dialogue over the next two days and a successful meeting.

Je vous remercie de votre attention.