

**Opening Remarks by Ms. Margareta Wahlstrom,  
Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction at  
The 6<sup>th</sup> International Seminar on Community-based Adaptation  
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Excellency Mr. Cao Duc Phat, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development

Excellency Mr. Tran Hong Ha, Vice Minister of Natural Resources and Environment

Distinguished participants, Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am honored to be invited to 6<sup>th</sup> International Seminar on Community-based Adaptation.

It has been more than seven years that the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) was adopted by 168 Governments at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Japan. The HFA provides a framework to reduce disaster through five priorities for prevention.

Since the HFA was adopted, many countries including Viet Nam have made progress in asserting that disaster is a development issue and therefore should be addressed in the development planning and decision making.

Countries, just like International Organizations, have been thoroughly challenged when aiming to reach out to all levels of society and make progress at a pace that has a genuine and long-term impact on people's lives.

In 2009 the International NGO Alliance for Disaster Risk Reduction conducted a review of the progress in disaster risk reduction at local level, called "Views from the frontlines". The message was clear, little of the progress at central level of Governments, had –at that time– trickled down and impacted the communities. These results are not encouraging. The message for all of us is to do a better job and also to communicate better.

In 2010, UNISDR launched the Campaign "*Making Cities Resilient: My City is Getting Ready!*". It aims to reach out to local governments and community organizations for the single goal of improving people welfare. More than 1,000 city and local governments have joined the Campaign. We are doing this in the context of increasing disaster losses that make

us sense the urgency to use our accumulated experience and knowledge to reduce risks with more determination.

This month, the IPCC Special Report on "Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation" (SREX) was released. Its key message is that while natural hazards are inevitable and the frequency of extreme events is rising as the consequence of climate change, the increasing disaster risk is primarily due to development practices that expose more people and assets to climate-related hazards faster than countries are able to reduce their vulnerabilities.

Let me give you some examples to illustrate this point.

In the last 30 years, the world population has increased by 87%. In the same period, this increase was 114% in flood-prone river basins and 195% in cyclone-exposed coastlines.

In East Asia and the Pacific, the annual GDP exposed to floods is almost 8 times higher in 2009 compared to 1970 while the exposure to cyclones is 6 times higher.

Human society and nature should be in balance. But the way we developed has forced nature to give way for human expansion to meet all our demands for rapid development gains.

What drives the risk?

Unsustainable development practices, poorly managed urbanization, ecosystem degradation and poverty are driving exposure and vulnerability and constructing disaster risk at a rate that is threatening human life, livelihood and development gains.

Climate and disaster risk trends are negative. Combined with other crises such as the recent economic and food crisis or conflict, the cumulative effects will increase pressures on countries and communities.

We need to determine how to achieve an explicit – less opportunistic and more realistic new development model – the one that is based on understanding the tradeoffs between current

decisions for relatively short-term development benefits and the long-term goals of vulnerability reduction and sustainability.

As many of you, I visited some communities in the Viet Nam Mekong Delta before coming here to see how development partners, NGOs and the provincial government use technology to cooperate with farmers in adapting their crops and improve household water supply in the changing water availability context.

The question remains whether these are sustainable solutions or only mitigation measures for the immediate problems. Economic growth, stress on natural resources and rapidly growing expectations of population for increasing benefits from the economic development are all challenging today's decisions.

Viet Nam has launched a strong, ambitious initiative on Community-based Disaster Management (CBDRM) that is building on a long-lasting tradition of local communities of self help and resilience.

CBDRM is also a way of focusing on a large number of people who remain vulnerable and exposed to disasters and climate risk and whose livelihoods are extremely dependent on a resource-base that is threatened by depletion due to economic pressures.

Our challenge is to learn to better support communities in understanding/ to understand how they can complement the science and technology with their indigenous knowledge to reduce risk of disaster and climate change. This is particularly important as science and technology are not easily accessible to them – and if accessible, often presented in highly technical language that also you and I may find difficult to apply.

Today, communities are connected already in an unprecedented way, well informed in most ways. Urban communities that are 50% of today's world's population have underwent quick changes. Migrating population come and go, merge and also absorb new community members.

Decentralization, which is pursued by a number of countries, can be the vehicle to enable local governments to accelerate disaster risk reduction and empower communities if and only when there is a true delegation of authorities, budget and provision of capacity development.

There is an urgent need for national policies such as the Viet Nam Community-based Disaster Risk Management Programme to provide mechanisms for institutionalized community engagement and participation in decision making as well as scaling up effective community approaches.

The 5<sup>th</sup> Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, which will take place in October this year, is dedicated to “Building Local Capacity for Disaster Risk Reduction”.

In a month, the UN Conference on Sustainable Development – the Rio+20 – will take place. Risk reduction was identified as one of the fifteen priorities under the "emerging topics" that will be considered at the Conference. How will Governments define the links between development and disasters through the outcomes of the Conference is key.

The Global Platform 2011 launched a call for the formulation of a "Post-Hyogo Framework" to provide guidance beyond 2015.

The post-HFA consultation process has now started. We encourage inputs from multi-stakeholder dialogues in each country to contribute to a post 2015 global framework that links to the post-MDG agenda, is inclusive, reflects widely shared concerns and priorities for actions.

Reducing risk and increasing resilience to natural hazards in different development sectors can have multiplied effects and accelerate achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

Only faster integration of policy and practices for climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction will genuinely assist rational decision making and good use of scarce resources. Being practical as in building on already tested practices, rational in terms of avoiding building parallel systems and respond to the sense of urgency to sustain livelihoods of people while the wealth is growing. Too many people’s livelihoods are uneven and fragile.

We should use the most effective mechanisms, networks and knowledge while working to tackle the main constraints in progress – the institutional mechanisms that were designed to achieve plans of a different era, We should support new mechanisms that could solve problems to achieve the goal of impartial and sustainable development - which require economic growth.

At last, I would like to note that we need to invest more in research and development. These are often cut off due to limited resources. More and strengthened evidence is needed to enable well-informed decisions to reduce disaster and climate risk as a central element of sustainable development.

I wish you good discussions over the next three days and I look forward to the outcomes of the meeting.

Thank you.