

**3rd ANNUAL MEETING OF THE EUROPEAN FORUM
FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION**

1 October 2012, Dubrovnik, Republic of Croatia

**Welcome address by Margareta Wahlstrom, Special Representative
of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction**

Does Europe need a framework for disaster risk reduction after 2015 ?

** check against delivery*

I. Introduction

Your Excellency Zlatko Garelić, Representative of the President of Croatia, Your Excellency Ranko Ostojić, Minister of Interior, Ms Dubravka Pleić Marcović, Representative of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Mr. Jadran Perinić, Director of the National Protection and Rescue Directorate, distinguished Representatives, Colleagues of the National Platforms and Hyogo Framework for Action Focal Points, partner organisations of the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction, International Organisations, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to be here today with you for this 3rd meeting of the European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction, a key event to stimulate and facilitate the exchange of information and knowledge among participating National HFA Focal Points and Platforms and regional partners from the 27 countries present. I am confident that this forum will be one more important step towards an increased safety and resilience of communities in this region – and in the world.

Let me thank the National Protection and Rescue Directorate for hosting the conference, under the auspices of His Excellency Ivo Josipovic, President of

the Republic of Croatia. Thank you to the National Protection and Rescue Directorate and to Mr. Damir Čemerin, Chair of the European Forum, for organising this event.

II. What is the situation today in Europe?

In any given year, the lives of over 200 million people world-wide are disrupted by disaster events. Risk is accumulating and disaster losses are rising rapidly in all parts of the world, including Europe.

In 2010 only, Europe experienced the biggest increase in disaster occurrence - plus 18.2%, compared to the decade's averages. Europe's 10-year average of disaster losses totalling US\$13.4 billion makes it the third most affected region in the world after the Americas and Asia.

Europe took time before realizing the full relevance of risk reduction and prevention. Preparedness and response are attracting most of the investments, this is due to the visibility of the results while investments in prevention are long-term and less tangible in the short run.

However, disaster prevention is crucial and a prerequisite for sustainable development. Investing in prevention makes sound economic sense. The PR of China is clear on this: to preserve the potential for economic growth, they must reduce disasters losses.

Governments are not always prepared enough for this. And **cities** are also facing increasing challenges. As is the business sector.

Europe has 72 % of its population living in cities. Cities hold the greatest economic and human assets and further potential for economic growth, but are also the most exposed and vulnerable to damage and loss.

Therefore, important efforts are being made by many cities to become more resilient to disasters risks. 1067 cities around the world have joined the *Making Cities Resilient: 'My City is getting ready!'* campaign, 403 of them from Europe. These cities are committing to the “Ten Essentials” for building resilience, which is a series of recommendations and guidance to make cities a safer place to live.

I am pleased to learn that the European Forum has developed a working group on building local resilience, currently chaired by Italy, and I look forward to hearing about its developments and the sharing of experiences via central-local initiatives and cities-to-cities learning.

Disaster risk reduction is also the responsibility of each citizen. Resilience requires individuals to take action in their communities. I therefore welcome to the “Award for Local Change”, later today, when we will acknowledge a Croatian citizen’s actions to build resilience at the local level. I understand the EFDRR working group on “information sharing”, chaired by Sweden to view possibilities of such Award.

8 European countries have developed national policy strategies for disaster risk reduction¹ and 10 have developed national climate change adaptation plans which include risk reduction components². Croatia, our host today, and two other countries³ in the region have revised national laws to include disaster risk reduction and resilience. I wish to congratulate them.

¹Armenia, Bulgaria, Finland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Sweden, and Switzerland

²Armenia, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

³Serbia and Turkey

Access to information is also critical to a successful disaster risk management. In this context, I would like to underline that too few countries **systematically account for disaster losses** and factor risk assessment info into national planning, investment and development decisions. Sound data are critical to take decisions concerning development planning and investments. You cannot manage what you cannot measure. Let me acknowledge Croatia, Italy, France and Serbia which are on their way to establish and institutionalize national disaster loss data bases and encourage all other countries present today to start this important process.

It is crucial that we further debate, research and document the economics of disaster risk reduction, particularly on the national level and widely share existing good practices of smart investment in disaster risk reduction. Furthermore, we need to overcome the challenge of demonstrating convincingly that disaster risk reduction is not a simple expenditure but rather a smart investment for everyone. This topic could be a good insight to be addressed by the European Forum through a working group.

III. Developing a post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction

2015 will mark the completion of the current 10-year term of the world's first disaster reduction plan - the *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters* (HFA) which has been to date the overarching international guidance on the implementation of disaster risk reduction. Now is the time to think about and discuss of what we would like the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction to look like.

All stakeholders have been called on to participate in a broad consultation process towards 2015, including through regional meetings such as

this one. I compliment the decision at the last European Forum meeting to include the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction as key focus of your meetings in the lead up to 2015. I look forward to what will emerge from this first consultation today and tomorrow. And, in particular, your views on some key questions emerging from the current consultations, such as:

- Do you believe we do need an shared framework for Europe?
- If yes, what needs to be in the framework? More commitments? Principles and values? Targets, plans of action? For example, do you believe we need some common European **targets** to achieve on DRR?

I encourage you to think about these questions and discuss during these 3 days, but also when you return to your country and have national dialogues. Governments' self-reflection on the implementation of the current HFA will indeed be an important part of this consultations. We are therefore relying on you to host national consultations and to share your key recommendations with us.

We will also need a good understanding of the future trends in the risk of disasters and climate change. The evidence produced by the Global Assessment Report, and the future forecasting by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and others will feed into our thinking on the post-2015 framework. We also need to be mindful of other 2015 milestones, like the **post-MDGs** and the development of sustainable development goals. Our aim is to firmly plant disaster risk reduction and resilience into the long term future of the planet.

There are various practical links between disaster risk management, climate change adaptation and sustainable development. These links have not yet been fully internalized. It is essential to continue to harmonize, integrate and embed disaster risk reduction within poverty eradication and sustainable

development policies and programmes. I am pleased to see that the European Forum working Group on climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction, chaired by Norway, has undertaken the important step to investigate how disaster risks reduction is mainstreamed into European regional, national and local investments in adaptation and I congratulate the group on their achievement that I understand will be the subject of an upcoming publication produced by this active working group.

In this context, I would like to thank H.E. President Dr.Gjorge Ivanov for hosting the South Eastern Europe's Heads of State Summit next June with a main focus on disaster risk reduction in the context of the sustainable development.

Let me take this occasion to mention one element that should be central, in my view, in any framework for disaster risk reduction or, even better, for sustainable development. It is the question of **governance**.

As you all know, the HFA was created to offer to countries a set of actions to take in order to strengthen its risk governance capacities and substantially reduce mortality and economic losses from disasters. The Global Assessment Report 2011 strongly underlined that improving governance is the driver that conditions all the other underlying drivers and therefore the single most important priority for reducing disaster risk.

Today, most governments, even in Europe, have not fully developed coordinated and coherent action on disaster risk reduction across different sectors and between central and local governments. A post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction should build on the current HFA.

One key element of governance is the establishment of a **National Platform**. There are currently 21 National Platforms in Europe working towards

the integration of disaster risk reduction into development policies, planning and programmes. UNISDR has started a National Platforms review process, where Sweden, Norway and Germany are taking an active role. This review should be considered as a major consultation exercise in the context of the post-2015 new framework negotiations that shall allow National Platforms to better position themselves at the national level and receive the full recognition of their role and functions. You will all have received a questionnaire in May this year and I encourage you to fill it as this is a unique opportunity for you, National Platforms, to highlight your views and successes and voice the challenges and gaps you may be facing on a daily basis that prevent you from achieving your targets.

Let me also mention **the HFA Review Process**, the richest source of information available to more effectively manage disaster risks. To date we have received 22 national reports and we look forward to receiving more.

Just last week another “Pioneer” Process was undertaken in Europe: the UK PEER Review of the HFA Monitor. Finland, Italy and Sweden with the support of UNISDR, the EC (who also provided financial support) and OECD, have reviewed the UK’s progress in implementing the HFA. This is a tangible collaboration to help improve UK Decision Support towards public investments in risk reduction. It will, hopefully, foster policy dialogue as well as enhance regional cooperation between countries exposed to the same risks. We look forward to hearing more about the outcome of the Peer Review during this meeting.

All the reflections and results of the post-2015 framework consultations will be presented at the next **Global Platform for disaster risk reduction** that will take place in May 2013 in Geneva. I hope you will be all attending this important event.

Then, in early 2015, **the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction** will be hosted by the Government of Japan. Essentially, the conference will present the results of these 3 years consultations and will propose, eventually, a post-2015 framework.

V. Conclusion and way forward

Just before I conclude my remarks, let me remind us all of the Rio+20 outcome document “The future we want” which has given disaster risk reduction great recognition. The document calls for an acceleration of the implementation of the HFA in the context of sustainable development. It recognizes that adequate, timely and predictable resources for risk reduction to enhance the resilience of cities and communities are needed. Rio+20 acknowledges that disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation must be integrated into public and private investments.

It is now critical that we keep the momentum generated by Rio +20 to strengthen disaster risk reduction efforts and to step up our efforts. Evidence is telling us that the risks of disaster and economic losses will rise even more. We need to get ahead of the risk curve, we do not have a choice any more if we are to secure a sustainable future.

With all of this in mind, I look forward to our continued, collaborative efforts towards building resilience, safeguarding lives and ensuring sustainable development and economic growth and I wish you a successful forum.