



World Conference on Disaster Reduction
18-22 January 2005, Kobe, Hyogo, Japan

PRESS RELEASE

UN/ISDR 2005/5
20 January 2005

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

United Nations to coordinate Early Warning System for Indian Ocean

Kobe, Hyogo, Japan - - Delegates gathered here today have pledged their support to create a regional early warning system in the Indian Ocean emphasizing the importance of international and regional cooperation. Experts agree that such a warning system could have saved thousands of lives when last month's tsunami disaster struck claiming up to 200,000 lives.

Countries participating in a special session of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, including those affected by last month's tragedy, recognized the importance of bolstering national systems and sharing experiences on disaster relief, post-disaster rehabilitation and natural disasters. "We have started a valuable team effort in supporting this system", said Sálvano Briceno, Director of the United Nations Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. "Connecting people, updating technical capacities and mobilizing communities is the key to its success", he added.

The new warning system will draw from the experience of the Pacific Ocean tsunami early warning systems making use of the existing coordination mechanism of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and other international and regional organizations. It was agreed that the United Nations will be responsible for coordinating the implementation of the system.

Key countries across the globe have already committed national resources and technical assistance in establishing the system, estimated at 30 million dollars. Following the 26 December disaster, affected countries in the region are setting up an interim system that would warn communities in the case of another tsunami before the new system is operational in a year's time.

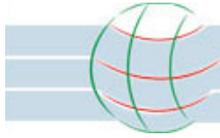
Building on the momentum of the world conference, a number of new regional and international meetings are being organized to support the implementation of this Indian Ocean system. Among others, the governments of Thailand, China and India



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have announced plans to host meetings to take place in their countries to identify priority areas and to assess and monitor early warning.

Emphasizing the invaluable role of local communities in responding to natural hazards, Jan Egeland, United Nations Humanitarian Emergency Relief Coordinator, said, “following the Indian Ocean disaster we had the most immediate and effective response ever from the humanitarian community to a major disaster, but it should never have happened”. Several speakers in the morning session expressed their hope that this new early warning system will make the Indian Ocean a safer place to live.

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