



International Strategy for Disaster Reduction

Opening remarks

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At the Third Public Symposium on Post Disaster Recovery

30 May 2006, Kobe, Hyogo, Japan

Mission

The ISDR aims at building disaster resilient communities by promoting increased awareness of the importance of disaster reduction as an integral component of sustainable development, with the goal of reducing human, social, economic and environmental losses due to natural hazards and related technological and environmental disasters.

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Dear Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure and honor to be present at the Third Public Symposium on Post Disaster Recovery. This year marked the 11th anniversary of great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, 1st anniversary of the adoption of the Hyogo Framework for Action and the establishment of the International Recovery Platform in Kobe.

These initiatives strongly supported by the Government of Japan, show the commitment and value that Japan places on learning from experiences of disasters and apply these lessons to risk reduction and to recovery and reconstruction efforts in the wake of disasters.

All too often, we continue to fail to learn from experiences and lessons of rebuilding from other countries, and have ended up rebuilding risks and unsustainable livelihoods, which have been lost in subsequent disasters. Hence, the importance of promoting Japanese experience in this regard. Mechanisms to ensure reducing risk to disasters are now developing. The Hyogo Framework for Action calls upon all of us to integrate disaster risk reduction as strategic priority in all reconstruction efforts.

The International Recovery Platform is one of the concrete outcomes of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction held in January last year here in Kobe. The IRP was established under the ISDR system with support from the Government of Japan, Italy, and Switzerland to promote capacity building amongst nations and communities and facilitate synergy among international actors to undertake risk resilient recovery. It carries out its activities through sharing of lessons worldwide, knowledge networking and developing tools to enhance recovery operations.

Following initial discussion with donor Governments and partner organizations, the ISDR secretariat requested UNDP to manage the IRP on behalf of the ISDR system and resources were transferred to that effect. The ISDR secretariat continues to play its active role through facilitating sharing of lessons learnt, supporting the documentation of experiences from the Indian Ocean Tsunami of December 2004 and sharing them through the ISDR system.

In this regard, we have been also privileged to have President Clinton, as UN Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery, dedicating his wise leadership to convince heads of Governments of the affected countries to focus on reducing risk. He has championed the idea of “building back better” as part of his efforts to ensure rapid but effective recovery and to develop an Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System.

After a review of activities by the IRP, I feel that there is an increasing need for the IRP to establish a service-oriented approach towards Governments and national institutions facing high levels of risk. The IRP also needs to actively seek the feedback from Governments on the type of knowledge support and recovery planning tools they need and then to assist the national authorities to develop these tools. It is critical that IRP promotes local lessons learnt exercises so that local authorities and NGOs are able to document their experiences. It should then be the purpose of IRP to disseminate these through knowledge networking. There are many assessments from

past national recovery experience at country level which need to be collected, systematised and made available to Governments facing the task of rebuilding after recent disasters.

After the recent Pakistan Earthquake, the assessments shared by ISDR system partners pointed towards rebuilding efforts of local people and groups with stone masonry in similar unsafe manners as prior to the earthquake. Weak capacities amongst Government agencies to factor in seismically safe experiences are another constraint. Hence the ISDR system was able to mobilise partners from other countries and networks like the Kyoto University and the Nepalese National Society for Earthquake Technology (NSET), and connect them to local NGOs like the Citizens foundation and the Earthquake Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Authority of Pakistan, so that knowledge and capacity gaps in seismically safe reconstruction are over come. These are the kind of activities, which IRP needs to be fulfilling by proactive intervention with Governments and assisting and facilitating the Governments to develop, advance Recovery contingency plans.

Finally, the ISDR secretariat is initiating a campaign for promoting disaster reduction. On 15 June, the world campaign on education will be launched in Paris in cooperation with UNESCO. Through this campaign we will promote and encourage protection of schools as a high priority everywhere. School protection and including risk reduction in the school curricular are the objectives of the campaign 2006-2007 and we also encourage you all to contribute, use, and support this initiative.

I hope that this Recovery Symposium will be able to provide renewed energy to the IRP to facilitate countries to overcome these knowledge gaps and a valuable opportunity to make disaster recovery an opportunity to build back better and safer.

Thank you for your attention.

Kobe, 30 May 2006