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**STATEMENTS TO THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL  
ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY  
FOR DISASTER REDUCTION (ISDR) AND INTERNATIONAL  
COOPERATION TO REDUCE THE IMPACT OF THE EL NINO  
PHENOMENON**

**Geneva, 25 July 2001**

Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates,

I am very pleased to present to the ECOSOC two reports of the Secretary-General on a subject to which I am particularly committed, namely, the strengthening of international cooperation for disaster reduction.

Two years ago, the Council recommended to the General Assembly the adoption of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) as the successor arrangements to the International Decade for National Disaster Reduction (IDNDR). The Council also recommended the establishment of an Inter-Agency Task Force to oversee the implementation of the Strategy and a Secretariat to promote the implementation of the Strategy and to support the work of the Task Force. The General Assembly in endorsing the recommendations, also decided to put these under the responsibility of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and also decided to review these arrangements in 2001.

As a vision, the ISDR builds on the experience gained during the IDNDR, particularly the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action established in 1994. One of the most valuable lessons learnt is that natural hazards do not necessarily lead to disasters. Disasters result from the adverse impact of such hazards on our vulnerable economic, social and ecological system. In other words, scientifically based human action can reduce vulnerability. The main task of the ISDR should therefore be the promotion of a global “culture of prevention”.

This would require a multi-sectoral and interdisciplinary approach and the active participation of all key actors in the implementation of the Strategy, including the integration of disaster reduction into relevant international efforts, such as sustainable development, climate change, desertification and poverty eradication. This, in my view, is the main challenge confronted by the Inter-agency Task Force and the ISDR Secretariat from the very outset.

Since its establishment, the Inter-agency Task Force has met three times and provided policy guidance and substantive input towards the achievement of the objectives of the ISDR. These objectives are outlined in the Framework for Action of the Implementation of the ISDR, which is being made available to you today.

The Inter-agency Task Force has also established four technical Working Groups, focusing on:

- Climate and Disasters;
- Early Warning;
- Risk and Vulnerability and
- Wild-land Fires.

These Working Groups enjoyed the active participation of many organisations and are led by key agencies, notably WMO, UNEP, UNDP and the World Conservation Union. A work plan for each Working Group has been adopted and substantive work has started. I look forward to the delivery of results from all Working Groups, which will be shared with the international community.

The ISDR Secretariat, as focal point for the promotion of disaster reduction within the UN System, work closely with a broad range of stakeholders for advocating disaster reduction in a coordinated manner including governments, civil societies, regional institutions as well as relevant international organizations.

In addition, the Secretariat also plays an important role in supporting the work of the Inter-agency Task Force. In this regard, the Secretariat of the ISDR seeks to complement and assist the work of a wide scope of organizations and agencies in their respective areas of competence.

In discharging its core mandate, the Secretariat for the ISDR has been carrying out specific activities, including, among others:

- the establishment of a systematic Global Reporting on Disaster Reduction Initiatives;
- the development of proposals for cooperation and backstopping of national platforms on disaster reduction;
- the development and dissemination of risk assessment methodologies and lessons learnt exercises;
- global campaigns to promote disaster reduction.

Mr. President,

The alarming trend of the last decade, namely an annual increase of an average 10% in economic loss due to disasters has continued unabated. The increasing number and magnitude of disasters pose a major threat to development and to our planet. We have recently seen this in a number of places. Appropriately, many statements made during this year's ECOSOC Humanitarian Segment a couple of weeks ago, stressed the need to emphasise disaster reduction as a key component in reversing this worrying trend. These costs are even more significant if we factor in the social and environmental consequences. Additional threats, particularly in the areas of climate change, poverty, desertification, environmental degradation and uncontrolled growth of urban areas, further increase disaster risk. Natural hazards are not confined to particular regions, nor do they discriminate between developing and developed countries. Nevertheless, it is developing countries that account for more than 90 per cent of the victims due to disasters triggered by natural hazards. This is all the more reason why special attention will have to be paid to the interests and concerns of developing countries, in our effort to address natural disasters, as called for in relevant ECOSOC and GA resolutions.

At the same time, disaster reduction continues to receive insignificant attention in resource allocations both by governments and the international community. Only approximately 1% of resources by international community for disaster management is directed towards disaster reduction measures, and most of that is spent in the developed countries.

Mr. President,

It is against this background that the Secretary General has come to the conclusion that disaster reduction must be placed higher on our collective agenda. More resources must be devoted to disaster prevention. We must also strengthen the key institutional arrangements to harness the concerted efforts of the international community in meeting these daunting challenges.

Given their promising start, the Secretary-General has come to the conclusion that the Inter-Agency Task Force and the Secretariat are the essential and appropriate mechanisms for furthering the goals of the Strategy.

The Inter-agency Task Force, with its broad membership, is able to draw upon a wealth of knowledge on disaster reduction issues from within the UN System, as well as from regional bodies, national platforms and civil society. It is recommended that the membership of the Inter-agency Task Force be expanded to ensure the inclusion of all key organisations of the UN System and regional

entities, as well as to fully engage the expertise and capacities of the representatives of civil society, including the experience gained by national platforms.

Our experiences of the past two years have also clearly demonstrated the need to maintain an effective focal point for the coordination of strategies and programmes of disaster reduction and to ensure synergy between disaster reduction strategies and those in the social, economic, environmental and humanitarian fields. The Secretary General has therefore proposed that the Secretariat for the ISDR should continue to discharge these functions, with the necessary flexibility to adapt to future challenges. It is also recommended that the Secretariat should expand its regional outreach, with special attention to Africa.

National and local participation is a crucial element to the success of the ISDR. In this respect I would like to call on Governments to cooperate with the Secretariat for the ISDR and other relevant UN entities to incorporate disaster risk reduction into their policies for sustainable development and allocate appropriate resources to that effect.

In light of the increasing importance of disaster reduction for the international community and given the fact this constitutes part of the core function of the UN, the institutional arrangements for the ISDR, namely the Inter-agency Task Force and the Secretariat, need to be given the appropriate and predictable resources to carry out their functions effectively. In this context, I believe that part of the funding requirements should come from the regular budget of the United Nations. I look forward to your support in order to start moving in that direction.

The challenges posed by natural hazards and related environmental and technological disasters will be critical for the survival of the planet in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The ISDR embraces these challenges with the full commitment and involvement of governments, national platforms, regional institutions and relevant international organizations. The magnitude and urgency of these challenges require us all to move from the intention to act to the action itself. I am ready to provide the support needed in this regard from our side, and trust all of you will work with us towards this goal.

Mr. President,

I would now like to present the report of the Secretary-General on “International cooperation to reduce the impacts of the El Niño phenomenon” to this Environment Segment of the ECOSOC. It covers the El Niño and related phenomena and ongoing activities to reduce their negative impacts.

It has been four years since the 1997/98 El Niño, which caused widespread devastation. In addition to the loss of over 24,000 human lives, more than six million people were displaced. In addition, more than 100 million people were affected in some respect. The negative consequences set back progress in economic growth and in social well being in many countries. Conditions associated with El Niño also created habitats favourable to insect vectors and other conditions that augmented infectious diseases.

Of all abnormal weather and climatic events, the El Niño is perhaps the phenomenon most likely to lead to extensive and devastating natural events affecting humankind. This is well evidenced by the consequences of recent El Niño occurrences. Unlike other disaster-inducing natural phenomena that have mostly local or regional impacts, the influence of the El Niño phenomenon traverses the globe and assumes many diverse effects. We emphasize that El Niño must also include consideration of the other half side of what is a cyclic process. In other words, El Niño's sibling 'La Niña' also has the potential to produce widespread devastation. The devastating floods in Mozambique and the recent drought in the Horn of Africa provide a pattern that is consistent with previous El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) events.

Therefore, international cooperation is vital in the monitoring, analysis and research of El Niño. It is in the light of such concerns that the General Assembly called for international cooperation and established the Inter-Agency Task Force on El Niño in December 1997, within the framework of the IDNDR.

You will recall that an international seminar was convened in November 1998, in Guayaquil, Ecuador. A key output of this endeavor was a thorough scientific and technical analysis of the 97-98 El Niño event. The meeting also inspired the development of a project to assess the impact of the El Niño event in 16 developing countries around the world. It provided valuable lessons learned in each country in the area of climate-related early warning and disaster preparedness.

Following these activities, the Inter-Agency Task Force on Disaster Reduction, established a Working Group on Climate and Disasters, as referred to

earlier, in May 2000, under the leadership of the WMO. This Working Group considers not only the El Niño phenomenon, but also other climate aspects of disasters within the framework of the ISDR Task Force. It is currently discussing priority areas of action to support effective co-ordination of information flows in respect of future El Niño events, as well as a review of sectoral monitoring systems. This Working Group is expected to serve as a main forum within the UN system for international cooperation to reduce the impact of the El Niño phenomenon.

Recently, the Inter-Agency Task Force on Disaster Reduction, at its meeting in Geneva, in May 2001 which I chaired, was briefed on a consensus statement on the current state of the development of El Niño. This statement was the result of a collaborative effort between the WMO and the International Research Institute for Climate Prediction, from Colombia University, USA, drawing on contributions from others. Further consensus statements are envisaged in the near future, to ensure continuous information is provided to agencies, national meteorological services and other end-users. Such efforts build on a better understanding of the oceanic-atmospheric interactions, as well as the mechanisms behind climate variables.

Current projections in a recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) suggest that there will be little change or only a small increase in amplitude for El Niño events over the next 100 years. However, even with little or no change in El Niño amplitude, global warming is likely to lead to greater extremes of drying and heavy rainfall and increase the risk of droughts and floods that occur with El Niño events in many different regions.

The international community must therefore be prepared to mitigate the negative impacts of El Niño-related events and other extremes of climate variability. Improvements in scientific and technical expertise through capacity-building efforts will enable developing countries to cope better with these climatic fluctuations. It is therefore important that organizations of the United Nations system, engaged particularly in developmental activities, should tailor their programmes to address the immediate and longer-term capacities required in this regard.

The Secretary-General's report presents a number of recommendations on the enormous work that needs to be done - in the areas of information, advocacy, education, and institutional cooperation. I ask for ECOSOC's continued support for such action.

These efforts are in line with the goals and objectives of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, which is also being discussed today. I am

convinced that our resolve to address the challenges posed by natural hazards, in particular in relation to climatic variabilities such as El Niño, will be critical for the survival of the planet in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I am fully committed to working with governments, regional institutions and relevant international organizations in responding to these challenges in a creative and proactive manner, particularly by promoting a new awareness that disaster reduction is likely to bring significant long-term benefits.

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