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**STATEMENT AT THE SPECIAL SESSION ON THE INDIAN OCEAN TSUNAMI DISASTER  
WORLD CONFERENCE ON DISASTER REDUCTION**

by

**Mr Andreas Goetz**

**Assistant-Director-General**

**Federal Department of Water and Geology**

**Chairman of the Swiss Platform Natural Hazards**

**Head of Swiss Delegation**

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I would like to join other speakers in thanking the organisers of this Conference for this special session on the terrible tsunami disaster that came as a big shock to all of us and called for our immediate response. We would like to seize this opportunity to express the heartfelt condolences of the government and people of Switzerland to all those who lost loved ones in this calamity.

Switzerland reacted immediately after the disaster struck on 26 December 2004. It has deployed some 80 experts and the government made available SFR 27 million for immediate emergency response. The Swiss public and private sector contributed, to date, some SFR 180 million, which is unprecedented in our history. It is a sign of solidarity with the affected communities and people.

In the framework of emergency aid and support for the rehabilitation of the affected communities, Switzerland considers it important to give due consideration to disaster reduction. The full rehabilitation of villages and towns provides an opportunity that should not be missed to plan on an overall level new housing, infrastructure and lifeline services. Switzerland thus advocates that during the rehabilitation phase, support to the affected communities should go beyond recovery to a similar standard as before and include disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness schemes, which provide additional safety and security. As such the aim should be to decrease their future vulnerability and exposure to risks.

According to our understanding, risk reduction should be considered as an integral part and contribute to the sustainability of the development efforts. A thorough assessment of hazards, vulnerabilities and risks in a particular location thus needs to precede the rehabilitation work. In addition, risks from natural hazards have to be compared with other risks (i.e. technical or environmental risks) and need to be weighted with the opportunities the location provides.

The risk assessment may not only take into account a possible future tsunami which might occur, from a statistical point of view, within the next 100 or even 200 years, but needs to consider all prevailing hazards: In Sri Lanka or Indonesia, for instance, structures have to withstand earthquakes, strong winds from typhoons or cyclones, flooding or slope failures.

The prime risk mitigation measure is land-use planning. New schools or health facilities which avoid hazardous zones have clearly a high life expectancy. Additionally, the costs for a new building which is earthquake or flood proof are only a few percent higher than without the proofing.

Where necessary, structural measures such as dams, dikes or slope stabilisation should be part of the recovery efforts. Finally, public structures as schools or similar facilities should be planned in a way that they can be used in case of emergency as shelter, as emergency management post or any other use during the time of crisis.

Proper rehabilitation of the tsunami affected areas is urgently required. In addition to rehabilitation, the affected population need to be made aware of risk reduction schemes, not only about new tsunamis but about all type of hazards which can affect a community. A know hazard is a reduced hazard. Only combined efforts which include all stakeholders, which consider all disaster reduction mechanisms and which are implemented according to sustainability principles have a chance to survive when the next disaster strikes.

Thank you for your attention.