

## **United States Commitment to Develop A Global Tsunami Warning System:**

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen:

This conference is about changing how the world reduces risk from hazards -- both natural and technological -- in order to prevent those risks from turning into disasters.

The President of the United States and the people of our nation are committed to strengthening the world's ability to meet these goals.

The very size of the recent tragedy in the Indian Ocean compels us to work together to turn this conference into a transformational event for the world, and to elevate disaster reduction to the same importance as matters of peace and war.

The United States feels that never again should lives be lost because a global tsunami warning system doesn't exist, and thus wishes to announce today a commitment to do whatever it takes, in partnership with others, to expand and enhance the existing Pacific Ocean tsunami warning system into a global system including the Indian Ocean, the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea to protect coasts and coastal areas from tsunami threats.

Those dramatic system expansions will be planned and implemented as a part of the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) being developed by the Group on Earth Observations.

The United States is strongly committed to the intergovernmental Group on Earth Observations and its efforts to achieve an integrated and sustainable Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS). Fifty-five nations and the European Commission have joined in the GEOSS initiative. The Third Earth Observation Summit will meet in Brussels on February 16 to formalize the status of the Group on Earth Observations and adopt its ten-year implementation plan.

We invite other nations to work with us on this common and urgent cause of saving lives. The United States believes that a global tsunami early warning system should be an

expansion of the existing system in the Pacific, which is coordinated by UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (the 'IOC') -- a GEOSS partner.

To make sure that this expansion happens without delay, the United States will propose that the development of a global tsunami warning system be a top near-term priority for the Group on Earth Observations when the Group meets in Brussels next month.

The United States will also continue to work with the G-8 to ensure high-level support for full implementation of the global tsunami warning system.

We urge other nations and relevant organizations that plan to upgrade earthquake or tsunami detection and warning systems to join the GEOSS process.

Additionally, the United States will work with international partners to develop and improve the system of communication, warning, and public education that serves to warn the threatened populations, and to ensure that such a system is suitable for many kinds of hazards and disasters, thus keeping us within the 'all-hazards' theme of this World Conference on Disaster Reduction.

Let me stress that an all-hazards philosophy -- consideration of all potential natural and technological hazards -- should permeate the plans to develop the tsunami warning system, and indeed be the basis of all national disaster management planning considered by this conference.

Let me also stress that a detection and monitoring system for tsunamis is necessary but not sufficient, by itself, to reduce a tsunami disaster. The technical systems for detecting and monitoring earthquakes, tsunamis or any other hazard must be complemented by an assessment of existing warning capabilities, training of local officials, installation of national and local warning communications systems, and a process of public education that will enable citizens in susceptible areas to respond appropriately to the warnings when they are issued.

We can't stress enough that monitoring and warning systems should be designed with the intent that they will, to the extent possible, serve to alert and inform at-risk populations about all major hazards in their area; integrating the entire system under an all-hazards approach. This is the best way to save lives and money.

Every village, sea port or nation at risk of tsunamis -- or indeed any hazard -- needs the ability to not only receive timely warning information; but the training to know what to do when the warning arrives. Transparency, good governance, and capacity building will be critical to creating a functioning warning and response system in these nations and communities. The United States is committed to helping to meet this need, and will do so through the U.S. Agency for International Development, the lead U.S. agency for providing assistance in this type of international capacity development.

The United States believes that a nominal disaster reduction system for tsunamis (and, indeed, for all hazards) would include the following processes and characteristics:

Risk Assessment: Advance modeling of coastline communities determines hazard areas and risk probability. Susceptible areas can be targeted for hazard mitigation and warning.

Detection: Observations and monitoring detect sub-sea earthquakes or other geologic process and reliably indicate whether a tsunami has been generated.

Warning: A warning message is issued by the monitoring institutions via communications centers and received by national and local officials in threatened nations within minutes. The warning is quickly communicated to the local at-risk population via sirens, mass media, specialized radio systems, and other notification technologies.

Response Plan: A local response plan exists and is activated. This response plan must be developed well in advance and communicated to the public.

Ready Public: Public responds appropriately, having been prepared and educated in advance.

Situational Awareness: The hazard situation is monitored until the "all-clear" is sounded. Because tsunamis often consist of a series of waves, and because subsequent tsunamis may be generated by earthquake aftershocks, people should not enter the hazardous zone again until the hazard is truly over.

Resilient Lifeline and Protective Infrastructure: Hardened shelters, protective shelters, and reliable supply routes for emergency response, food and water supply, and medical

evacuation should be constructed in accordance with international building codes appropriate for locations at risk of hazard events.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, let me say that the United States has a demonstrable record as a donor to humanitarian relief and as a world partner in sharing technology and information to save lives. Today we renew that commitment.

Once again, with this statement, my government and its people commit themselves to providing support and leadership to reduce disaster losses from hazards throughout the world through international partnerships that promote these processes and characteristics.

Let me say that the United States fully supports the "Common Statement of the Special Session" which the conference Secretariat has worked to prepare.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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Drafted: EST – D Hermann / IO – L Roeder

Approved: IO – M Lagon

Cleared:     OSTP – G Whitney  
              NOAA – H Wood  
              EST – K Maher