

The delegation of the Kingdom of Belgium thanks the Government of Japan, the Prefecture of Hyogo, the city of Kobe and the ISDR, for the organization of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, and wishes to express their will to actively and positively contribute to the achievement of the priority of actions that will come out of it.

On a general manner, Belgium is in line with the positions presented by Luxemburg, which holds the Presidency of the European Union. She supports the participation of the European Commission as full member of the intergovernmental process of the Conference.

Resource mobilisation

Belgium shares the idea that additional financial resources should be mobilised for disaster reduction. She therefore is favorable to an effective integration of the concern for disasters into existing development financing mechanisms and a subsequent enhancing of these. She wishes to avoid the dispersion of means and is not in favor of the creation of any new fund, organization or convention. She also favors the harmonization between donors, the simplification of the procedures and a coordinated or even delegated approach of international assistance, while recognizing a preeminent role for the United Nations in such coordination.

Scope of the concept of disaster

Although there exists a certain number of strictly natural hazards, i.e. on the incidence of which human activities have no effect - this is the case, for example, of the earthquake that originated the Indian Ocean tsunami - we nevertheless are aware that these tend to become a minority with regard to the increasing number of disasters that are directly or indirectly caused by human activities or by options chosen in economic development.

Disasters and climate change

Belgium recognizes the link between climate change and the increased incidence of hydro-climatic hazards. She therefore is of the opinion that the debate about disaster reduction should be developed in a close relationship with that one about climatic change, as well with regard to *adaptation* to reduce vulnerability (= prevention of the consequences) as with regard to *mitigation* of greenhouse effect gases emissions into the atmosphere (= prevention of the causes). Belgium greets the upcoming entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol, as a first important step toward the long-term challenge of mitigating greenhouse effect gases, and as a significant contribution to the overall disaster reduction endeavor.

Disasters and environment

We are convinced that disaster prevention is fundamentally linked to rational policies of land use planning and economic development, which take into account, already from their conception phase, environmental risks and the protection role of natural ecosystems. According to this, we wish to strengthen the political weight and promote the implementation programmes of the different Multilateral Environmental Agreements, in particular the Conventions on Climate Change, on Combating Desertification and Land Degradation, and on Biodiversity.

Vulnerability - poverty

Poverty is a worsening factor in the vulnerability of the population to disasters. However, this should not lead to consider vulnerability as a fatality, but on the contrary, it should raise the awareness that

poverty reduction policies must also integrate measures aiming at reducing vulnerability through an improved risk management.

Belgium reckons that a disaster reduction policy includes a strengthening of the national and local institutional framework and improved governance.

Gender policy

Disaster reduction, like any other policy that aims at managing our society better, should integrate a gender dimension, not only through post-disaster recovery strategies that would be differentiated according to the specific needs of women and children, but also through a larger involvement of women in risk management and prevention measures.

Decentralisation of disaster reduction policies

Belgium underlines the importance of promoting a decentralization policy in risk management, which does not necessarily imply the weakening of the centralizing factor, but an adaptation of it. Local communities have an essential role to play in disaster preparedness and in the organization of the rescue to victims. Belgium supports the principle of creating multisectorial national platforms.

Disaster reduction and coherence of legislations

Many disasters overwhelm national capacities and require regional or international cooperation. Many delays in obtaining assistance from beyond frontiers are caused by insufficient preparedness of the recipient countries as well as of the international providers of humanitarian help. This disaster preparedness implies increased responsibility and quick response capacity to emergency situations, at international, national and local levels. This should be made possible through laws, policies and other regulating mechanisms. We acknowledge the important role played by *International Disaster Response Laws, Rules and Principles* (IDRL) and by the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, in the search for practical solutions for the understanding and the improvement of legal and regulating frameworks in order to improve the international capacity of response to disasters at all levels.

Value added and follow-up of the Kobe Conference

The Kobe Conference should contribute to identifying lessons learned and good practices in order to integrate disaster reduction into national sustainable development and/or poverty reduction strategies. The follow-up of this process and the implementation of the priorities of action should be carried out at national and local levels. Rather than creating a new structure and a new financing mechanism specific to the disaster reduction theme, Belgium will push the integration of this concern into existing structures and financial mechanisms, and will consider enhancing the resources to be allocated to these.