



**World Conference on Disaster Reduction
Kobe, Hyogo, Japan, 18 – 22 January 2005**

**Statement of the Greek delegation
delivered by H.E. Ambassador Tassos Kriekoukis
20 January 2005**

First of all, allow me to thank the Japanese Authorities for their warm hospitality and to express our gratitude to the Japanese Government for their initiative to propose holding this important conference.

The recent tragedy in South East Asia has deeply moved the Greek people who themselves live in a natural hazard-prone country. It is not a coincidence that Greece was among the first countries to come to the aid of the people hit by the dramatic recent catastrophe by dispatching aircraft with relief supplies and specialized personnel. As we already announced on the 11th of January in Geneva, the overall Greek aid amounts at more than thirty million US dollars which will be channeled in the form of humanitarian and development assistance as multilateral aid through the UN system, as multilateral aid through the European Union, and as bilateral aid to countries hit by the disaster.

Greece has accumulated much experience with disaster reduction throughout the centuries. Yet, during the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction and the succeeding International Strategy for Disaster Reduction this experience has been enhanced by taking actions in the following areas :

- establishing a firm legal framework for the development of a coordinating mechanism with central and regional bodies and continuously working towards the realization of a national platform for risk management. This new approach coincided with the major recent challenge Greece had to face : the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. The experience during the planning and operational period of this special event convinced us of the value of having a firm legal framework, all hazard planning and the establishment and operation of Interagency Teams.

- Promoting risk reduction in built environment. Seismic codes are continuously updated, vulnerability assessment of all public buildings mainly schools and hospitals is underway, and on the occasion of the Olympic Games sport facilities have been retrofitted.
- A significant special concern is the seismic protection of the cultural heritage and long term measures have been launched to this effect.
- Training and education of several targeted groups (teachers, school principals, students, engineers, civil servants, volunteers, majors) is a major priority for us as it is vital in determining the final outcome of disaster reduction efforts.
- According to recent legislation Volunteer organizations have a supporting important role in civil protection operations.
- To strengthen preparedness warning systems utilizing scientific and technical information from various fields and combined with public information have been proven very useful in the areas of extreme weather phenomena and forest fires. Multiagency exercises have also been proven invaluable in the improvement of the responding mechanism preparedness and the revision of plans.

As our goal to make the world safer is a common responsibility, Greece is always ready to share its experience with all parties interested.

Furthermore, Greece can offer several specific services such as the Athens Multinational Sealift Coordination Center (AMSCC) for the purpose of coordinating and monitoring emergency transport.

As has been already stressed by various participants, all forms of cooperation and coordination initiatives should be encouraged, be it on the global or regional level. It is important to pursue a comprehensive disaster risk reduction strategy and focus on its prompt implementation. This conference is a milestone event and we should not miss the opportunity to build on it.

Thank you.