

World Conference on Disaster Reduction

Speech by Mr. KWON WOOK

Administrator of the NEMA, Republic of Korea, Kobe, January 19, 2005

Mr. Chairman. Ladies and Gentlemen;

Before sharing with you some of my thoughts, I would like to express my appreciation to you for the tremendous efforts that have gone into organizing and participating in this important event.

According to the WMO Annual Report, last year is ranked the fourth warmest year since meteorological records began in eighteen sixty one.

It also reveals that nine out of the last ten years are included in the warmest-year category, indicating that the temperature may continue to rise due to global warming.

The report warns that due to weather change, natural disasters such as typhoons, torrential rains, storm surges, heatwaves, and droughts will occur more frequently.

Last year, four hurricanes in Florida in just six weeks caused tremendous damage in the US and neighboring countries.

Japan also suffered from typhoons on more than ten occasions last year.

The pain did not end there.

On December twenty sixth, an earthquake near Sumatra caused a tsunami, claiming more than one hundred sixty thousand lives in eighty countries and devastating almost all infrastructures and housing along the coast of the Indian Ocean.

The tsunami disaster may not be the worst to have ever struck the earth.

It was, however, surely unprecedented as the first truly global disaster.

It has brought home to us in the most graphic way the great need for much closer international cooperation to prepare against global disasters.

I hope that it will serve as a spur, bringing the countries of the world closer together to join in our efforts to counter such threats.

Against such a backdrop, this World Conference on Disaster Reduction holds particular significance, with recent events imbuing great meaning in this gathering.

I hope the sense of urgency at this time will prove a catalyst for really fruitful results.

If we include typhoon-related disasters, on average Korea experiences seven disasters annually, causing one hundred thirty six casualties and about one point six billion US dollars in damage.

The annual cost of recovery is about two point five billion US dollars and increasing.

On June first two thousand four, Korea established an independent National Emergency Management Agency with the aim of ensuring that a truly safe Korea can be built.

Mr. Chairman, let me just briefly share some best practices on disaster reduction in Korea. Most natural disasters in Korea, say about eighty four percent, are water- and wind-related disasters.

It was to reduce the impact from such development that we proposed the Disaster Impact Assessment Program and Disaster Impact Pre-consideration Program.

These programs aim at fundamentally eliminating potential causes of disasters inherent in various development projects in advance, with the ultimate goal of protecting life and property.

This program is one good example of the implementation of sustainable development.

Also, in the wake of social trends and innovations in safety awareness, monitoring and early warning systems, for example, have been established as a social safety network.

Disaster information is disseminated to the people using cellular phones which have a cell broadcasting function.

Again, the tsunami disaster in Indonesia has sounded an alarm bell.

We must use this as a spur to forge closer international cooperation against global disasters, including early warning systems.

Amongst the victims were many foreign tourists and we are still experiencing difficulties in our endeavors to identify all Korean victims.

This has brought into sharp relief the need to establish collective agreements and international networks in the area of immigration control, focusing on the victims of disasters.

As a country which is relatively strong in information technology, South Korea is more than willing to participate as a member in such a project to establish an international disaster management mechanism.

In closing, I would like to say that we should congratulate ourselves on gathering together today to share with each other our experiences for our mutual benefit.

I believe that the best way to pay homage to those who have lost their lives in recent natural disasters around the world is to make the task of doing all we can to build international cooperation programs our fervent aim.

By pooling our wisdom as we discuss best practices in the field of disaster management it is our sincere hope that ultimately we will save lives.

I very much hope the WCDR yields practical outcomes, playing a constructive role in helping to reduce the damage from natural disasters that cast a dark cloud over the dawn of the twenty first century.

Thank you for your kind attention. Thank you.