

**Address by Hon. Mr. Purna Bahadur Khadka, Minister of Home
Affairs, and head of the Nepalese delegation to the World Conference on
Disaster Reduction, Kobe, Japan, Jan. 18-22, 2005**

Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen

At the outset, I would like to congratulate you on your election to the Chairman of this Conference. We look forward to a meaningful outcome of this Conference under your able guidance. I also want to thank the Government of Japan, the Mayor and the people of this historically charming city of Kobe, for the warm hospitality extended to us as well as for the excellent arrangement made for the Conference.

The gracious presence of their imperial Majesties has greatly inspired us all, and the kind address by His Imperial Majesty has given us guidance. Similarly, the rich and thought provoking statement by the Honorable Prime Minister of Japan has inspired us to forge ahead united.

I believe that the long experiences of Japan in the prevention and management of disaster could be utilized to build the resilience of nations and communities to reduce the disaster. I also believe that countries like Nepal can take more advantages from the rich experiences of Japan because of the similarity of physical environment and natural hazards.

Mr. Chairman,

We are meeting here against the backdrop of the unprecedented destruction caused by Indian Ocean Tsunami. My delegation also would like to offer its heartfelt condolences to the countries and people in the region, which had to face the fury of nature on a scale and intensity never imagined. This tragic event has once again brought into sharp focus the urgent need for greater solidarity and cooperation at all levels to put in place early warning system as also strengthening further the existing ones. In this context, we support the Special Session on the Indian Ocean Disaster. We are also positive about, and open to, the proposal of China, which, among others, calls for establishing regional mechanisms for early warning system.

Mr. Chairman,

Ten years ago, the Yokohama Conference, also held in Japan, had come out of 10 principles as framework for approaching the issue of disaster reduction in a more comprehensive manner. Ten years down the road and after the ravages of the Tsunami, it is abundantly clear that the challenges facing us are still enormous. Despite efforts at national, bilateral, regional and international levels, the vulnerabilities of societies to the risks and hazards remain increasing. What is more saddening is the fact that most of the disasters occur in the developing countries, with the poor people becoming the worst victim, during and after the disasters, due mostly, to the lack of public awareness.

Mr. Chairman,

Nepal is also one of the most disaster prone countries. Complex geology, very high angle of slopes, rugged and fragile geophysical structure, variable climate conditions, active tectonic process, unplanned settlement, population, economic condition and low literacy rate have made Nepal vulnerable to various types of natural disasters. Most part of the country is seismically active. Hence, the geomorphology of the country is very fragile. The Himalayan region of Nepal can also be considered as one of the severest flood hazard zones of the world. Besides, heavy precipitation, high wetness and steepness of watersheds and river channels contribute to flood magnitudes. Many middle hills are prone to landslides and the Southern plains to flood and fires. Thus, flood, landslide and fire are the most frequent natural disasters in Nepal, occurring almost every year in one part of the country or the other and causing heavy loss of life, extensive damage to physical properties and critical infrastructures.

Despite these challenges, we have been making efforts to develop our capacity not only for the relief and rehabilitation; our focus has now been increasingly on building capacity for prevention, management, mitigation and reduction. We have adopted Disaster Relief Act in 1982, which include national policy, strategy and legislation. We have also begun integrating disaster risk reduction into our national development policies and plans. The current 10th Plan has made it mandatory for every project to conduct the environmental impact and natural disaster appraisals before the implementation stage.

Similarly, National Action Plan on Disaster Reduction, 1996 is reviewed thoroughly to address the emerging needs of the country in the field of

disaster prevention and management. Among several other things, the National Action Plan has prioritized the disaster reduction and management as multi-sectoral activities in our development plan. It has underlined the need for the preparation of hazard assessment and mapping of the recurring disasters such as Earthquake, Flood and Landslides etc. Despite ongoing insurgency and paucity of resources, Nepal has been gradually picking up the momentum towards improving the disaster management in the country. These are not easy task for Nepal, which is severely constrained, in the resources-financial-material and even skilled manpower. Nevertheless, we are determined to do our best to prevent disaster and mitigate their impact by mobilizing our internal resources.

Mr. Chairman,

We are aware of the responsibility of each national government towards the disaster reduction related activities. But it is equally imperative that the international community provides resources and technology for developing countries, particularly for the LDCs so as to increase their institutional capacity. We, therefore, attach great importance to the draft Programme Outcome Document, which focuses on building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters and also stresses the need for addressing the many challenges posed by disasters of all kinds in a holistic and comprehensive manner. We support the objectives and expected outcomes and strategic goals it has set for us to achieve in a spirit of global partnership and with the greater application of knowledge, innovation and education. I wish also to underline that this Conference should give serious thought in assisting developing countries to not only remove the socio-economic disruption caused by disasters but also to support them in developing their long-term capabilities for disaster prevention and management.

Mr. Chairman,

Finally, I want to conclude by saying that our informed and enlightened debate in the overall framework of the Yokohama Strategies and Plan of Action, together with the benefits of the lessons learned, will be instrumental in charting a long-term and forward looking roadmap to develop the resilience of nations and communities to effectively prevent, manage and reduce the risk of all kinds of disasters.

I thank you Mr. Chairman. Thank you all.