

*Statement for the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (Kobe, Japan  
18-22 January, 2005)*

*Mr. Chairman,*

We meet here at a time when the Tsunami disaster has caused massive devastation in terms of tremendous human loss and large scale destruction of physical infrastructure in the coastal areas of South East Asian countries. The world stands shocked and aggrieved at the unimaginable human loss and the sufferings of survivors. Such suffering and devastation is shocking in both its magnitude and the speed with which it occurred. The catastrophic proportion of the tragedy has lent a sense of urgency to the task of devising strategies to strengthen local, national and international capacities to address the issues of natural disasters which, apart from causing death and destruction for millions, continue to impede the development of many countries by their incessant recurrence.

I am sure that the world has learnt certain lessons from this colossal calamity. I will like to share those lessons with you:

- The tsunami catastrophe has revealed the extent of the ill-preparedness of the world at the national, regional as well as at international levels to anticipate disasters and to make proportionate efforts for providing immediate rescue assistance, medical care and to rehabilitate the infrastructure.
- The affected countries were lacking adequate early warning systems. The existing departments were not equipped to anticipate the disaster;
- The national focal points for mitigating disasters were almost absent and lacked required capacities;
- The disaster reduction system was not able to gear itself towards efficient and swift coordination among all relevant agencies in the post-disaster phase;
- The civil defence system was not able to cope with disasters of such magnitude;
- The national, regional and international bodies involved in disaster reduction and relief assistance lacked proper coordination and financial resources;

We should have known this already, but it has taken a tsunami to press the point home. The question now is whether we will act over the long term in the same spirit of unity and solidarity that characterizes the current moment.

