

**Statement by the Delegation of Trinidad and Tobago  
to the Second World Conference on Disaster Reduction  
Kobe, Hyogo Prefecture, Japan, 18 – 22 January 2005**

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Mr. Chairman

Distinguished Heads of Delegation

Esteemed Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is indeed a pleasure to address this distinguished gathering at this Second World Conference on Disaster Reduction. I commend the erstwhile efforts of the Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction in making the preparations leading to the convening of this Conference.

From the onset may I, on behalf of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago join my voice to all those who have extended condolences to the affected countries in the Indian Ocean following the Sumatra Earthquake and the ensuing Tsunami that has wrought untold suffering and losses of human lives. The positive and unprecedented response from the global community has proved to be a positive light in this otherwise horrific occurrence.

Mr. Chairman, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has ascribed great importance to this Conference and its ultimate outcome, for it recognizes that

sustainable development cannot be achieved without strong commitment to disaster reduction at the national, municipal, community and individual levels.

In this context, it is of the view that the use of available scientific data and the new information and communication technologies are some of the key instruments in building capacity for change.

As a member of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and as a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), Trinidad and Tobago fully endorses the Mauritius Strategy for the further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States which was adopted during the International Meeting held last week. For us, the proximity of the two meetings provide a unique opportunity for ensuring that the special concerns of SIDS in the area of disaster risk reduction are adequately addressed.

In fact, the International Meeting in Mauritius recognized the important 10-Year Review of the Yokohama Strategy and Programme Outcome for the period 2005-2015 as critical instruments in addressing the particular concerns of Small Island Developing States (SIDS). These concerns include the availability of affordable insurance and re-insurance schemes, the establishment of 'all-hazards' early warning systems and the development of adaptation strategies to climate variability and climate change. Despite many views to the contrary, we remain convinced that climate change is a reality which is already contributing to the exacerbation of existing hazards which in turn is compounding our existing vulnerabilities. Therefore, in our region we have placed emphasis on developing appropriate adaptation and mitigation strategies.

Mr. Chairman, if we are to build capacity and develop resilience, then non-traditional threats must be taken into consideration. This is but one of the lessons learnt from the Indian Ocean Disaster, which Region had never before suffered a Tsunami of such proportions. We therefore strongly support calls for the establishment of global early warning systems but we urge that such systems cover all hazards. Moreover, these early warning systems can and should incorporate to the extent possible, existing traditional knowledge. This in turn, calls into question the issue of education at all levels as well as the use of local knowledge. We have accepted that building awareness is an important tool in disaster risk reduction that must be pursued at the community level to ensure that those most likely to be affected are prepared to respond adequately in adverse situations. The threat of natural disasters are for us a way of life. While fortuitously, Trinidad and Tobago has not been badly affected by severe weather systems in the recent past, we have only to look at the plight of our immediate neighbour Grenada, to witness the life changing destruction that can be caused by a natural disaster. Moreover note should be taken of the fact that in 2004, the Caribbean faced close to US 4 billion dollars in losses due to hurricanes, floods and earthquakes.

We have paid attention to the call for education. This as well as adaptation and mitigation strategies will require increased resource mobilization and we have noted with interest the call for a proportion of humanitarian and relief funds to be dedicated to the reduction of disaster risks and vulnerability. While acknowledging the crucial role of international cooperation and partnerships, concerted action has also been taken autonomously at the regional and national levels to achieve a number of targets with the ultimate goal of building disaster resilient nations and communities.

For example, the Caribbean Community has adopted the Comprehensive Disaster Management Strategy (CDM). The priority areas of this mechanism has already been afforded high importance by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, particularly in relation to Risk Identification, Assessment, Monitoring and Early Warning, Knowledge Management and Education, and the Reduction of Underlying Risk Factors. Traditional knowledge continues to be applied as an immediate first step in communities, through a comprehensive programme of public information and education even as initiatives in technological applications are recognized as an imperative. Our National Disaster Office has undertaken the mapping of several hazards, the results of which are available to the general public. A Critical Facilities Task Group also monitors the mitigation, preparedness and response capabilities of Trinidad & Tobago's critical facilities.

On the issue of governance, Trinidad and Tobago is currently undergoing a comprehensive restructuring of its Disaster Management System that will include appropriate legislative enactments to enable institutions and policy frameworks to benefit from the force of law. The system will also be strengthened with the establishment of an Interministerial Committee on Disaster Management comprising Ministers of Government whose portfolios span areas of responsibilities related to disaster risk reduction. Moreover, the new Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management (OPPM) will have a more holistic coverage including not only natural hazards but also those which may be environmental or technological in nature. Just as we expect that the Framework of Action of this Conference will be forward looking and build on the foundations already laid in the previous decade, we have already begun to take the relevant steps to ensure that at the national level, our policies and practices are also evolutionary, building on lessons learnt and relevant best practices.

In closing Mr. Chairman, may I take this opportunity through you, to thank the Government of Japan and in particular, the people of the Hyogo Prefecture for their kind hospitality and enthusiastic cooperation. The success of this Conference is in no small measure due to the excellent arrangements made by our Host. The holding of this Conference ten years after the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake is testimony to the resilience of the people of this wonderful Prefecture and confirms that with adequate planning and effective response, recovery is achievable and that the lessons learned can provide the basis for informed action in the future.

Mr. Chairman, I Thank You.

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Mr. Chairman, I Thank You.