

STATEMENT DELIVERED BY ACP GROUP SECRETARIAT

DURING

**THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON DISASTER REDUCTION
KOBE, HYOGO - JAPAN, 18 TO 22 JANUARY, 2005**

Mr. President,

At the outset, please accept salutations of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group (ACP Group) Secretariat to the World Conference on Disaster Reduction. We congratulate you and other members of the Bureau for your respective elections and anticipate a successful outcome of the Conference.

Mr. President,

The world community has recently witnessed the devastating occurrence of the Tsunami disaster which affected several countries in Asia, and many other countries of the world. The ACP Group sends deepest condolences and sincere sympathies to all the affected. The complete devastation brought about by the Tsunami disaster have led to irreparable losses in human lives, numerous homeless families and communities, substantial socio-economic ruin and is truly an environmental catastrophe. The Tsunami disaster completely wiped out decades of progress and development that had been achieved through painstaking domestic efforts and international collaboration.

Mr. President, the Tsunami disaster reflects a Herculean ASIAN challenge, an AFRICAN challenge and indeed a GLOBAL challenge to tackle the issue of Disaster Reduction through the creation of Early Warning Mechanisms and the promotion of a culture of disaster preparedness and mitigation.

In addition, it is critical to take measures which would avail humanitarian emergency aid but also put in place appropriate measures that can help

countries to anticipate natural disasters and minimize their effects.

The massive Tsunami has made an impact as far away as East Africa, affecting for example Somalia, Tanzania and Kenya. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has estimated in its January Report that some 54,000 Somalis, particularly those who were living along the North-Eastern coast of the country, have been directly impacted by the disaster.

The fishing industry in Somali was also greatly affected, as this time of year coincides with the peak of the fishing season. In addition to the large number of houses and fishing boats which have been damaged and destroyed, the Famine Early Warning System Network of the US Agency for International Development (USAID), warns us of a more INVISIBLE threat. Water systems and water sources in the affected areas of the Eastern African States, particularly Somalia, have been partially destroyed and many shallow water wells have been either completely contaminated or buried by sea water, rendering them useless for human consumption. **The DANGERS ARE CLEAR.**

Affected households are therefore in need of urgent humanitarian assistance, especially since many parts of Somalia were already suffering from four consecutive years of drought and periodic floods, in addition to chronic insecurity.

In this regard the ACP Group of States acknowledge and greatly appreciate the work of the United Nations in its coordination of relief efforts through its

humanitarian coordinator and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which have been working closely with an emergency disaster response group established by the Somali Prime Minister. The ACP avails itself of this opportunity, to officially thank the UN for launching a flash inter-agency appeal for more than US\$10 million to help the thousands of people in Somalia, and the Eastern African coast who suffered from the impact of the Tsunami.

The principal objectives facing this Conference concern the review of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World; and challenge to formulate a clearly defined and practical Programme of Action which will build the resilience of nations and communities to disasters for the years of 2005 to 2015. The ACP Secretariat urges the Conference to squarely tackle these goals, stand up to this challenge and thus contribute to the urgently needed disaster reduction.

Mr. President,

The ACP Group of States continues to be gravely concerned about the occurrence of natural disasters and the accompanying devastations. In the recent times, members of the ACP Group have suffered tremendous losses arising from natural disasters including from hurricanes, threat posed by locusts and environmental damage. The series of hurricanes which swept through several countries of the Caribbean region resulted in tremendous loss of human life and socio-economic infrastructures. In our view, in addressing these issues, it is crucial to consider the extreme vulnerability of

the economies of Island Developing States that can be wiped out at any time by natural disasters. Also, we the entire international community should ensure that the necessary human and financial support is quickly mobilized for reconstruction in the countries which have been devastated. An equally significant issue relates to the urgent need for the international community to set up, as a matter of urgency; effective, rapid-response systems to deal with natural disasters.

Permit me Mr. President, to provide a very brief update on the recent activities of the ACP Group which is currently working, under the framework of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement with the European Union to highlight and find solutions to the great threat which natural disasters pose to the long-term development of our countries.

In November last year, at a meeting of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly in the Hague, Netherlands, there was overwhelming political support for the Kyoto Protocol on climate change, its urgent ratification and application. There was also overwhelming recognition of the negative impact upon ACP vulnerable islands, as a result of the climate change caused by global warming. The ACP Group expressed deep concern regarding the fact that natural disasters are becoming more frequent and intensive, causing considerable damage in a large number of countries, in particular in the Caribbean. Parliamentarians noted that the violent storms, hurricanes and rising sea levels posed dangerous threats to the safety of populations and the very existence of vulnerable small island developing states, and coastal areas all ACP regions. The Declaration concluded with a

very strong encouragement of the European Union and the International Community to create effective rapid response systems, that would in addition to humanitarian assistance, provide the appropriate measures in ACP countries to address the long-term challenges which arise in the aftermath of a disaster.

Little did we know at the time that the TSUNAMI disaster would provide such a crystal clear example to the world, of the totally destructive impact of natural disasters and the critical importance to focus upon preventive measures, and long term reconstruction.

The ACP Working Group of the Committee of Ambassadors has taken the initiative to propose the creation of an ACP-EU Natural Disaster Facility to implement long-term sustainable programs for disaster reduction and post-disaster reconstruction and rehabilitation. The creation of this Facility is rooted in our Group's appreciation that natural disasters have the potential to cause large scale death; severe damage to infrastructure and material goods; and an adverse and in most cases, a crippling effect on countries economic and social development.

The main objective of this proposed ACP-EU Natural Disaster Facility is to reduce the impact of a disaster by building up a country's capacity to deal with an emergency. The activities are to include:

***Crisis Preparation** through the development of **Early Warning Systems**, evacuation and rescue plans ;

***Risk Recognition** to facilitate assessment of the phenomenon; the creation of prevention systems to mitigate the effects of disasters and to address the issue of vulnerability;

***Monitoring potential disasters** with the help of scientific and technical cooperation to improve levels observation and predictability;

***Reducing risks** through appropriate and administrative regulations to develop national and regional mechanisms;

***Risk Management** which included the issue of warnings and the provision of immediate emergency assistance to reduce the impact of a disaster on the population.

***Medium and long-term response** to target the re-building of infrastructure and the provision of services, medical attention and psychological assistance to the population.

Mr. President, as we in the ACP Group continue to try to establish to make our hopes and dreams of creating such a Facility a real possibility, we thought it useful to bring this current example of work in progress to this Meeting's attention. This brief overview is to simply illustrate that we in the ACP Group, are extremely concerned with, and are actively working towards finding realistic and long-lasting solutions to very similar and pertinent questions that are raised in our discussions this week.

We are confident, that with continued determination and a steadfast commitment to the cause, we will both succeed and achieve our goals on disaster reduction.

The link between climate change, environmental protection and the sustainable management of natural resources was addressed at the first meeting of ACP Ministers of the Environment held in Brussels in December 2004. The ACP Group used this opportunity to emphasize, inter alia, its reaffirmation of the importance of environmental protection and sustainable management of natural resources for the development of ACP countries and the fight against poverty.

The ACP Ministers voiced their concern about the unprecedented devastations caused by the locust plagues in the West and Central Africa and called for long-term solutions to be found in collaboration with interested development partners. Regional cooperation and assistance from the international community were identified as key players to support the implementation of emergency measures to halt future plagues. Ministers recognized the importance of a pro-active approach and supported initiatives for a preventative locust control campaign to be implemented in countries that are subject to these occurrences.

Mr. President,

The question of Natural Disaster reduction is directly interlinked with the fields of environment, sustainable development, economic growth and poverty eradication. These fields were the subject of international consensus and partnerships as reflected in the outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, South Africa. Today, as the various stakeholders deliberate on how to reduce natural disasters and

the link to sustainable development; it is crucial to emphasize that accelerated implementation of the WSSD Declaration and the Plan of Action will significantly contribute of a sustainable approach to natural disaster reduction.

Mr. President,

We urge the Conference to fully address this interface between disaster reduction and sustainable development. The Millennium Development Goals and targets indeed reflect a holistic approach in addressing development in key sectors such as economic, education, social, health, gender and environmental protection. We are all aware that adopted goals have to be achieved by the year 2015. Reaching MDGs 2015 targets such as the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; combating diseases like HIV/Aids and malaria, environment and developing a global partnership for development all needs a comprehensive boost and leverage from natural disaster reduction programmes. This is essential so that MDG goals serve as an important catalyst in mitigating global marginalization of most developing countries and boost these countries socio-economic performance and prospects.

This Conference today takes places against the background of previous multilateral initiatives including those on Sustainable Development, the United Nations Millennium Summit, United Conference on Least Developed Countries, and Review of the Barbados Plan of Action for Island Developing Countries. This Conference should aim to provide practical guidelines on how to inject further momentum to implement the various programmes,

including enhancing the role of development partnerships, the mobilization of additional support and new resources, and strengthened implementation.

This Conference is timely as it provides us all with the means to collaborate and achieve these objectives through a collaborative effort.

In conclusion, permit us to express the compliments of the ACP Group to the Government and People of Japan for hosting the World Conference on Disaster Reduction and their meticulous fashion of organization. ACP Secretariat commends the United Nations, for its leadership in this area and the Conference Secretariat for the technical and logistical work which has been extended since the United Nations General Assembly decided to convene the Conference.

I Thank You.
