

Address by H.E. Mr. Yoshitaka Murata  
Head of the Japanese Delegation (Minister of State for Disaster Management)  
On the occasion of the Opening Ceremony  
for the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction  
18 January 2005

Your Majesties the Emperor and the Empress,  
Mr. Jan Egeland, U.N. Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs,  
Representatives of Member States, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

I am privileged to address my sincere congratulations on this occasion of the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which has attracted such a large attendance. I would like to extend, on behalf of the host country, Japan, a warm welcome to everyone present here. I would also like to express my deepest appreciation to the Conference Secretariat and everyone involved, for their dedication in bringing this Conference into reality.

At the opening of the Conference, I would like to express my deepest condolences to the people killed by the Sumatra earthquake and the following tsunami which occurred at the end of last year and my sincerest sympathy to the millions of people affected who are suffering from the devastations. The international community has shown strong solidarity in response to the tragedy. Japan, as a member of Asia is also providing support to the maximum extent possible. I pray for the recovery and rehabilitation from the disaster to be as early as possible.

In addition, the world has witnessed numerous damage caused by various natural hazards, which are recognized as great obstacle to sustainable development. Last year, Japan was affected by the largest number of disasters in recent years. Just yesterday, we commemorated the tenth anniversary of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. As such, I believe the significance of disaster reduction has received growing attention among people in Japan and throughout the world, and therefore this opportunity to discuss on building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters is truly significant.

We have to live with the risk of natural hazards. However, we can alleviate the suffering from hazards by reducing the vulnerability of societies. When Japan was poorly prepared against disasters in the devastated and vulnerable land

after the World War II, every major typhoon cost us thousands of lives. Learning from these tragedies, Japan has since reinforced the systems for disaster management and invested in disaster reduction. Today, the number of victims from typhoons has been greatly reduced.

In Japan, disaster reduction is one of the most important policies of the Cabinet. Minister of State for Disaster Management which I hold, is one of the positions of Minister of State assigned to key cabinet policies for specific fields. I am responsible for the promotion of comprehensive disaster reduction efforts in the government. In addition, to push forward both efficient and effective measures for disaster reduction, Japan has created a multi-sectoral coordination mechanism called the Central Disaster Management Council, headed by the Prime Minister, which provides strong leadership in Japanese disaster management system. In my capacity of assisting the Prime Minister, I am striving to make my country disaster-resilient, not only in times of emergency but in ordinary times as well.

Nonetheless, our society is changing constantly, and Mother Nature confronts us with a whole host of unanticipated issues. Moreover, societal changes such as rapid urbanization and the aging population transform the nature of vulnerability to disasters as well, constantly requiring us to cope with new challenges. I was made painfully aware of this as I witnessed last year's series of major disasters. Keeping track of the causes of the vulnerability in light of the changing circumstances in societies, and taking concrete and tireless efforts through common recognition of every stakeholder to reduce disasters is vital.

Applying the knowledge and expertise acquired from numerous bitter disaster experiences, Japan has been an active facilitator of international cooperation for disaster reduction through ODAs and multilateral frameworks. Based on the discussions at this Conference, Japan will pursue to promote further efficient cooperation in the area of disaster reduction.

I strongly hope that this Conference will be the opportunity for the international community to take a great stride forward in the reduction of disaster impacts throughout the entire world, with a strong ownership of each Member State in terms of disaster reduction as well as in cooperation with relevant stakeholders.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.