



World Conference on Disaster Reduction
18-22 January 2005, Kobe, Hyogo, Japan

Media Monitoring Report

WCDR Overview

The World Conference on Disaster Reduction took place in Kobe, Japan (Hyogo prefecture) from 18 to 22 January 2005. The Conference addressed a broad range of issues aimed to reduce the risks facing millions of vulnerable people worldwide to natural hazards. Taking place just three weeks after the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami, participants at the world gathering agreed to set up a global early warning system for all types of natural hazards and, more specifically, a system for Indian Ocean countries in the event of future tsunamis which was expected to be in place next year.

At the end of the week-long event, the 168 delegations in attendance adopted a framework for action calling on States to put disaster risk at the center of political agendas and national policies. The ten-year action plan - "Hyogo Framework for Action: 2005 – 2015" – will aim to strengthen the capacity of disaster-prone countries to address risk and invest heavily in disaster preparedness. The Conference also adopted a declaration recommending, among other things, that a "culture of prevention and resilience" must be fostered at all levels and recognizing the relationship between disaster reduction, sustainable development and poverty reduction.

A number of side events were also held which attracted extensive media attention. Thematic segments brought together experts from United Nations agencies, governments and international organizations to discuss issues such as good governance, environmental management, community education and the role of the media in disaster prevention.

The World Conference has been labeled as the biggest venue ever to discuss and commit to disaster reduction with almost 4,000 participants in attendance; 168 States; 78 observer organizations from the UN and other inter-governmental organizations; 161 NGOs; and remarkably, 154 media organizations represented by 562 journalists.

Summary

A total of 395 articles (108 English, 253 Japanese, 18 French, 16 Spanish) were collected between 17 to 28, January which focused exclusively on the Conference (*Japanese clippings not included in this report*). Among the mainstream media covering the Kobe Conference were the BBC, CNN, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Financial Times, the Guardian, Le Monde, Liberation, Le Figaro, the Voice of America, all major Japanese dailies and all major international news wires.

In addition to the four languages mentioned above, media monitoring generated articles in the following languages (*not included in this report*): Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, Chinese, Danish, Farsi, German, Italian, Korean, Malay, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Swahili and Turkish.

The 142 articles included in this report only represent a portion of overall print media coverage stemming from the Conference and, with a few exceptions, do not represent radio or television transcripts. Wire reports, for example, were reproduced in at least 60 newspapers worldwide (***please see complete list of media outlets which carried stories on the WCDR; page 7***).

Key Issues

With the Indian Ocean tragedy on the forefront of global attention, nearly all of the opening day articles spoke of the Conference as a means to reduce the tolls of such disasters. Some referred to the gathering as the “tsunami conference” and a “global conference on the tsunami catastrophe”. Several articles portrayed the event as an opportunity for the United Nations to urge “experts to move quickly and donors to be generous in the wake of the Asian tsunami”. (*AP, DPA, AFP*)

The majority of the media coverage focused on the **creation of a tsunami-early warning system for the Indian Ocean** with many referring extensively to UNESCO’s International Tsunami Warning System for the Pacific to serve as an example. Such a warning system, several articles state, could have saved thousands of lives in the Indian Ocean region when December’s disaster struck. The media also underlined the the United Nations’ central role in setting up and coordinating such a system. Most round-up stories printed on the final day of the Conference led with the creation of the Indian Ocean Tsunami Early Warning System as being the major breakthrough of the week-long event.

The announcement to create a global early warning system for all types of natural hazards - **International Early Warning Programme (IEWP)** – on the second day of the Conference received significant coverage in the media. Again, articles picked up on the central coordinating role the United Nations would play on the project while at the same time drawing attention to the multiple national initiatives with similar intention, namely those from the United States, Japan, Germany, France, China and India. Articles also expressed the concern of some officials “that too many states and agencies were vying for the limelight”. (*AFP, FT*)

The United States’ position on global warming and references to **climate change** in the outcome document was also focused on by several media. “The United States, which opposes the Kyoto protocol on global warming, is trying to remove references to climate change in UN talks aimed at setting up a disaster early warning system, a US official said Wednesday. The US has voiced objections to ‘multiple’ references to climate change in drafting documents for the global conference in Kobe”. (*AFP*)

Another key issue raised was that of “**megacities**” and their special vulnerability to natural hazards. These overpopulated urban centers, the press stated, are where the “poor were most at risk from a lack of investment and planning”. Tokyo, in particular, was singled out as one of the most vulnerable cities on the planet. (*Reuters, FT*)

Key Personalities

Speaking at the opening press conference, **Jan Egeland**, UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, said the Conference would focus heavily on building up the resilience of nations and communities to disasters. Several stories carried his opening remarks to the Conference plenary quoting his remarks made in the context of the Indian Ocean tsunami; “The best way we can honor the dead is to protect the living” (*AP, Xinhua*). Reporting on the closing press conference, several media picked up on Mr. Egeland’s expressed hope that the number of deaths caused by natural disasters would be halved over the next decade. A number of articles also mentioned his

proposal to have "10 percent of all funds spent as emergency aid should be spent for disaster risk reduction" (*AP, Reuters, FT*).

On the proposed global warning system, **Sálvano Briceño**, Director of the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, said, "this new programme will help bring safety, security and peace of mind...millions of people worldwide owe their lives to effective early warning systems" (*AP, AFP, UPI, Xinhua*). He was also quoted widely in response to questions on the Indian Ocean system stating that it would "be running in 12 to 18 months" (*New York Times, AFP, DPA, Reuters, the Australian, Swiss Info*). The proposed system, he added, "would integrate regional disaster reduction strategies." (*AFP*). His comments on educating local communities were also picked up by media. "Educating people to the dangers of a tsunami, and what to do in case one strikes are a crucial part of the tsunami warning process...We have to respond to the dangers of tsunami as soon as possible so we have to use what we have to hand" (*Reuters*).

The video message of Secretary-General **Kofi Annan**, which was screened at the opening ceremony, was picked up widely in the press. Several opening day articles, in the context of the December tragedy, opened with his quote "we must draw on and act on every lesson we can to prevent such tragedies from occurring in the future" (*AP, Reuters, Xinhua*). *Reuters* also published that he was urging the "world to learn from the killer Asian tsunami, saying spending now could limit the loss of life and damage from inevitable natural disasters".

Yoshitaka Murata, WCDR Chairman and Japanese State Minister for Disaster Management, was quoted broadly throughout the Japanese language newspapers. Most of them ran stories at the opening of the Conference quoting his statement referring to Japan's culture of disaster prevention and long experience in dealing with natural disasters; "In the devastated and vulnerable land after World War II, every major typhoon cost us thousands of lives...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" (*AP*).

Most first-day stories quoted **Emperor Akihito of Japan** who addressed the opening ceremony. The *AP* reported on the Emperor's speech where he said "The most important factor in disaster reduction is to learn lessons from past disasters and to take measures in response." The German Press Agency - *DPA* - stated his hope that "Japan's knowledge and skills for preventing natural disasters, gained through its own experiences, would help diminish damages caused by natural disasters around the world". Also published was the Emperor's call to "cross natural boundaries" to assist more vulnerable communities in preparing themselves.

The pledges made by Prime Minister **Junichiro Koizumi** at the opening ceremony for Japan to support other countries in disaster preparedness measures was also picked up by Japanese and international media; *Reuters* quoted him saying "As a result of our experience, we have learned many disaster reduction lessons we can share with the international community".

Articles on the Indian Ocean Tsunami Early Warning system spoke extensively of UNESCO's Pacific Ocean system and quoted the Secretary-General of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, **Patricio Bernal** who underscored the importance of community education; he said that an effective warning system required "long-term efforts aimed at teaching people about tsunami and at increasing awareness of them" (*DPA*).

Also of UNESCO, **Laura Kong**, Director of the agency's International Tsunami Information Centre in Hawaii, was quoted by the *AP* as saying "Many governments are talking about early warning systems. What is most important is to have an aware population, so that every citizen along a coastline knows what a tsunami is, knows the warning signs".

Michel Jarraud, Director-General of the World Meteorological Organization, was quoted widely in both English and French media. The *FT* published him saying, "Climate change was contributing to the number of meteorological and hydrological disasters, which together accounted for 90 per cent of natural catastrophes". The *AP* mentions his reference to last year's string of Caribbean hurricanes causing relatively few casualties in the United States and Cuba and which tell "us the importance of preventive measures".

Speaking of the environmental damage caused by December's tsunami, **Klaus Töpfer**, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme, was quoted in the *FT* as saying "Disasters can wipe out years of development in hours," and that disasters posed a huge threat to the UN's millennium development goals, which aim to halve global poverty by 2015. The press also drew attention to his concerns about the role environmental degradation played in how severe the effects of some natural phenomena could be.

Anwarul Chowdhury, the UN's High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, told *VOA* that natural disasters have a disproportionately high economic, social and environmental effect on small island states. He noted that small islands suffered significant damage to their coral reefs during earthquakes, tsunamis and other natural disasters.

Echoing calls made for a change in thinking about disaster reduction, **Marco Ferrari**, Chairman of the Drafting Committee, said "what we would like to see is a shift in the cultural approach to disasters in many countries...this means integrating local and federal officials, as well as scientists and insurance companies, into a legal framework for risk reduction" (*Swiss Info*).

The *AP* and *AFP* ran stories on the climate change debate quoting **Mark Lagon**, Deputy Head of US Delegation, who said the issue was a "well-known" controversy and that there were "other venues" to discuss it. "Our desire is that this does not distract from this process," he added.

At the close of the Conference, *Reuters* ran a story stating that aid workers welcomed the agreement on the early warning system but said the framework agreement lacked concrete details of how its ambitious goals were to be achieved. It quotes **Eva von Oelreich** of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies as saying, "You have to ask whether this conference and its outcomes have honored those who died in the Asian earthquake and tsunamis... Have they brought hope to the survivors and to other vulnerable people that soon the day will come when the chance of such horror occurring again will have been reduced to the minimum?"

Rolando Gomez
Information Officer
UN Information Service
Geneva
5 February 2005

Selected list of media outlets which carried stories on the WCDR

English:

ABC News (US)
* Agence France Presse
(English Service)
Al Jazeera (English Service)
All Africa.com
* Asahi Shimbun
* Associated Press
* Associated Press Dow Jones
* The Australian
Australian Broadcasting Corp.
* BBC
Belfast Telegraph
Bloomberg News (US)
Boston Herald
Canadian News Wire
Canoe (Canadian news
website)
CBS News (US)
Chicago Sun Times
China Daily
* Chosun Ilbo (English Service)
(South Korea)
* Christian News Service
City Press (South Africa)
* CNN
* CNW Canada
Daily Times (Pakistan)
* Daily Yomiuri
Denver Post
* Deutsche Welle
* DPA German Press Agency
Environment Network News
* European Commission
External Relations
* Financial Times
Fox News Channel
* The Guardian
Gulf Daily News (Bahrain)
Herald and Asahi
Houston Chronicle
The Independent (UK)
Independent of Bangladesh
Indianapolis Star
International Herald Tribune
* InterPress Service
* IRIN (OCHA)
* The Japan Times
* Jiji Press
* Kazinform (Kazakhstan)
Khaleej Times (UAE)

* Kyodo News
Las Vegas Sun
Mail Guardian (South Africa)
National Post (Canada)
New Scientist.com
Newsday (New York)
New Straits Times (Malaysia)
* New York Times
* Papua New Guinea Post
Pittsburgh Tribune Review
* Reuters
* Ria Novosti (Russia)
Salt Lake Tribune
Seattle Post
The Scotsman (UK)
Silicon Valley On-line
Star Bulletin (Thailand)
The State (South Carolina)
The Statesman (Bangladesh)
* Swiss Info (English)
Taipei Times
Tehran Times
Times of India
* United Press International
United Nations News Service
USA Today
* Voice of America
* Wall Street Journal
Washington Times
Wired News
*Xinhuanet (English Service)
* Yomiuri Shimbun

French:

* Agence France Presse
* Associated Press (French
Service)
* Canada Dot Com
Le Devoir (Canada)
Edicom Suisse
* Liberation
* Le Figaro
* Le Monde
Le Temps
* Reuters (French Service)
* Swiss Info (French Service)
Tribune de Geneva

Spanish:

ABC Color (Spain)
* Agence France Press
(Spanish Service)
* Associated Press
(Spanish Service)
* BBC Spanish
* Clarin (Argentina)
Diario ABC (Paraguay)
Diario de Noticias (Spain)
* EFE Spanish News
Agency
* El Comercio (Ecuador)
El Pais (Uruguay)
* El Mundo (Spain)
El Nacional (Venezuela)
El Pais(Colombia)
El Periodico (Andorra)
La Prensa (Peru)
El Tiempo (Colombia)
* Reuters (Spanish)
* RPP Internet News
Service (Peru)
* Swiss Info (Spanish
Service)

Japanese:

Asahi Shimbun
Kobe News
Kyodo News
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Sankei
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(* included in enclosed report)

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE

EUROPEAN MEDIA

MEDIUM: Financial Times
AUTHOR: Frances Williams
DATE: 17 January 2005

Kobe meeting to agree tsunami warning system

GENEVA -- A detailed blueprint for a basic tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean is expected to be agreed at the United Nations conference on disaster reduction this week, delegates said. While preventing a repeat of the Asian tsunami disaster will inevitably be a prime focus of the five-day UN meeting, which opens in Kobe tomorrow, its purpose is to promote action to cut the toll of death and destruction from all natural hazards. The conference opens a day after the 10th anniversary of the earthquake that killed more than 6,400 people in the Japanese city. Better and more comprehensive early warning and disaster preparedness systems are a priority. An Indian Ocean warning system could be operational by the beginning of next year, with the technical elements costing a fairly modest Dollars 20m (Pounds 10.6m), according to some estimates. Far more difficult and time-consuming, disaster experts say, will be setting communication links and training volunteers within local communities about what to do when warnings are received, and if necessary provide safe places for potential victims to go. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which helped establish a cyclone warning system in Bangladesh, says it took five to seven years to get that system working effectively, but the benefits in saved lives have been enormous. In 1991 a tidal surge of more than 10 metres killed 140,000 people but 2.5m were safely evacuated. In 1970, a lesser cyclone killed half a million people, notes Eva von Oelreich, the federation's head of disaster preparedness and response. Moreover, once the basic elements of an early warning system are established, they can be used for all types of disaster. Floods, drought, earthquakes, storms, strong winds, torrential rains and mudslides hit the world an estimated 300-500 times a year, causing on average 60,000 deaths, 95 per cent of them in developing nations. The deadly tsunami on December 26 showed that "we are all vulnerable to natural disasters", said Salvano Briceno, director of the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. One consequence has been a surge of international interest in this week's long-planned world conference on disaster reduction in Kobe. Natural disasters are expected to increase, due in part to climate change, and to affect more people, especially in poor countries.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: BBC
AUTHOR:
DATE: 17 January

'Billions' affected by disasters

At least 2.5 billion people have been affected by natural disasters over the past 10 years - an increase of 60% over the previous decade, the UN says. More than 478,000 people were killed by disasters such as earthquakes, floods and hurricanes, from 1994 to 2003. The most vulnerable people are those living in developing nations, it says. The figures come ahead of a world conference on reducing the damage caused by natural disasters, which will look at a tsunami warning system. The five-day meeting in Kobe, Japan, begins on Tuesday - a day after the 10th anniversary of an earthquake which shook the city, killing more than 6,000 people. The conference had been scheduled to take place before the devastating Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, which killed more than 158,000 people on 26 December 2004. Prevention - Floods and earthquakes are the deadliest natural disasters, accounting for more than half of the total casualties over the course of the decade, the UN says. Asia is named as the continent most affected during the period, accounting for more than half the casualties and more than 90% of those injured, left homeless or needing emergency assistance. Numbers worldwide peaked in 2002, with millions affected by floods in Asia, and drought in India, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe. Thousands of government officials, experts and specialists from around the world are expected to attend the Kobe conference to discuss ways to reverse the growth in numbers of people affected by natural disasters. They are expected to produce a plan for a tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean and other measures to reduce the risk of natural disasters. Ahead of the meeting, the UN's emergency relief chief, Jan Egeland, said he was convinced more attention should be given to disaster prevention and preparedness. "We need to be more than a fire brigade," he was reported as saying. The UK's international development minister has called on government officials at the conference to boost spending on risk reduction. "Poorer countries have fewer resources to cope with disasters and so are more vulnerable," Gareth Thomas said, "yet measures are available now such as early warning systems that could save lives."

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Agence France Press

AUTHOR:

DATE: 17 January

Scientists get to work on early warning system after tsunami disaster

KOBE -- Scientists from 150 countries have begun drafting a global action plan to save lives during disasters, with the United Nations (news - web sites) urging experts to move quickly and donors to be generous in the wake of the Asian tsunamis. UN chief humanitarian coordinator Jan Egeland said the conference needed to look broadly at how to reduce risks during all disasters, by advising standards for safe buildings and encouraging education that could reduce deaths. "I am acutely aware of how much is being spent on our being fire brigades, of putting plaster on the wounds, and too little preventing the devastation and the suffering in the first place," Egeland told the meeting in the western Japanese city of Kobe. Egeland, who famously accused rich countries of being "stingy," called in Kobe for donors to devote money to prevention measures. "I would propose that over the next 10 years a minimum of 10 percent of the large sums now spent on emergency relief by all nations should be earmarked for disaster reduction," Egeland said. The five-day World Conference on Disaster Reduction was originally designed as a meeting of scientists and low-level civil servants on the 10th anniversary of the devastating earthquake in Kobe from which the city has rapidly rebuilt. But the conference has taken on a new momentum after the giant waves on December 26 killed more than

168,000 people and led to outrage as to why Indian Ocean nations were so ill-prepared. "It is not enough to pick up the pieces after a tragedy like this happens," UN Secretary General Kofi Annan (news - web sites) said in a message telecast into the conference hall. "The world looks to this conference to help communities, nations and citizens in the face of natural disasters, to mobilize resources and empower populations," Annan said. The meeting includes more than 3,000 experts and officials -- with registration doubled since the tsunamis -- in a follow-up to a first conference on disaster prevention in 1994 in Yokohama near Tokyo. The meeting in Kobe was previously slated to set new disaster reduction goals to be met by 2015, but Egeland urged the scientists to act more quickly. "I urge this conference to adopt the proposed framework of action, but with an accelerated timeline and clear indicators for building disaster resilience at a local and global level," Egeland said. A UN document on progress since Yokohama -- dated less than a week before the tsunamis battered the Indian Ocean -- listed as a shortcoming the failure to build a warning system for disasters worldwide. The UN education and scientific agency UNESCO (news - web sites) estimates that a system that could have warned Indian Ocean nations about the tsunamis would have cost a mere 30 million dollars -- a fraction of the economic cost of the disaster. UNESCO has said a warning mechanism for the Indian Ocean was expected to be functional with a global system in place a year later. But Egeland stressed an effective alert system would need to consider not just tsunamis but all sorts of natural disasters which can take enormous tolls unless countries have plans in place on how to cope with them. "Early-warning systems targetting vulnerable communities should be put in place in all disaster-prone areas," Egeland said. "Children everywhere should be learning about safe havens around them as part of their basic education. Communities everywhere should be better trained to handle disasters," he said. The tsunamis have drawn an outpouring of global sympathy in part because of the unprecedented international nature of the natural disaster -- nationals of more than 50 countries died or remain missing. Some 478,100 were killed in disasters around the world since 1994, a drop by one-third compared with the previous decade, but the number of people affected went up by 60 percent to 2.5 billion, according to figures provided by conference organizers.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: European Commission External Relations (Press Release)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 17 January

The European Commission supports the UN Disaster Reduction Conference in Kobe

BRUSSELS -- The European Commission is providing €360,000 (around US \$480,000) to support a key United Nations conference on disaster reduction in Kobe, Japan on 18-22 January 2005. The event, coming less than a month after the tsunami tragedy in the Indian Ocean, is expected to attract several thousand participants including government and community representatives and scientific experts in disaster reduction from around the world. It is being organised by the UN's International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR). The funds from the Commission are being channelled through ECHO, the Humanitarian Aid department, whose mandate includes disaster preparedness activities. They will cover, among other things, the presentation at the conference of 24 good practice initiatives in reducing disaster risks around the world. Louis Michel, the Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid said: "Having a sophisticated alert system and populations that are prepared will enable us to save many lives in the future. The European

Commission is fully committed to supporting a global alert system to prevent natural catastrophes such as tsunamis, earthquakes and cyclones.” Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the Commissioner for External Relations, said: “The conference takes place in Kobe ten years to the day after the city was devastated by a terrible earthquake. The importance of the conference is all the more evident following the Indian Ocean disaster. The European Commission strongly supports the United Nations in its efforts to mobilize and coordinate the action of the international community in disaster risk reduction for the decade ahead.” The terrible events of 26 December 2004 and the predicted increase in climate-change related events, such as storms, floods, droughts and rising sea-levels, tragically highlight the importance of scientific efforts to predict natural catastrophes and ensure that appropriate information quickly reaches those most at risk. Tsunamis, earthquakes, hurricanes, volcanoes and other natural disasters now pose a greater global threat than war and terrorism. Finding ways of reducing the impact of natural disasters is vital. A particular priority is an early warning system that is able to alert the three billion people – around half of the earth’s population, who live in areas vulnerable to natural catastrophes. Other important measures include better advance preparation of these vulnerable populations, effective evacuation procedures, technical studies and surveys such as hazard mapping, small scale mitigation works and training for local communities in how best to respond when disaster strikes. In addition, the international community must increase co-operation to mitigate climate change. The European Commission is an active participant in disaster reduction activities, through its environment policy and its funding of scientific research and through humanitarian projects, development co-operation, civil protection and external assistance actions that seek to improve the preparedness of vulnerable communities and their ability to mitigate and respond to the consequences. The Kobe conference – held in the shadow of one of the world’s worst ever disasters - will be an important forum to promote effective disaster risk reduction, to argue for its integration into wider sustainable development policies, to exchange knowledge about the best ways of managing and reducing the risks, and to commit to strategic goals for action in the decade ahead. Experience shows that the impact of disasters is always greater on poor communities, showing the direct link between levels of development and disaster risks

END ITEM

MEDIUM: The Guardian

AUTHOR: Tim Radford

DATE: 18 January

Lessons from Kobe - After the tsunami, the UN conference starting today in Japan must produce real action, not more rhetoric

Tsunamis travel over deep ocean at up to 500mph. Earthquake waves travel through bedrock at speeds of 2,000mph or more. But radio signals travel at the speed of light: 186,000 miles a second. So even in the most sudden disasters, warning is possible. And even a minute’s warning could save thousands of lives. But that is true only if the people who get the warning can pass it on to those most at risk - and then only if they know what to do to save themselves, their children, their livestock and their homes. But knowledge alone is not enough. Every community must have places - schools, hospitals and so on - designed to withstand flood, hurricane, giant wave or shaking earth, and to which villagers and townspeople can turn. So survival depends not just on open lines, wakeful authorities and an educated public, but educated planners, builders and building inspectors as well. Constant vigilance is the price not just of liberty, but of human life. Today the world’s disaster professionals - seismologists,

oceanographers, wind engineers, planners, doctors, relief workers, civil servants and government ministers - are meeting in Kobe, Japan, to discuss a safer and better world. Kobe is just the place to concentrate minds: it was here on January 17 1995 that an earthquake killed more than 5,000 people, injured 41,500, destroyed 100,000 homes and left 300,000 people huddled in tents. In all, the quake cost \$100bn: the costliest natural disaster in history. Earth scientists record more than 30,000 quakes a year, of which, on average, one is hugely destructive. In any year, there are 50 eruptions from the world's 500 active volcanoes; potentially an estimated 500 million people are in the firing line. In the past decade hurricane, typhoon and cyclone damage has increased: 2004 was the costliest year yet for insurance companies, even before the Indian Ocean tsunami of December 26 that claimed 150,000 lives. In that decade, the number of lives lost to natural disaster fell, but the economic losses, and the number of homes, farms, and livelihoods harmed, have soared. So as well as saving lives, any coherent preparation for calamity could save billions of dollars and alleviate the suffering of hundreds of millions of people. The Kobe earthquake was a national disaster. The Indian Ocean tsunami was an international one, washing over the shores of 11 countries and claiming victims from at least 50. If ever there was a stimulus for the UN Kobe disaster conference, it was the December 26 disaster. So will things change? The disaster professionals know what they want their own governments to do and have drafted a set of promises that all nations could endorse. Good intentions are fine, but the challenge is in the delivery. In March, the first draft of the good intentions carried some concrete targets for action with a timetable attached, and the whole package was linked to UN goals to halve poverty, double access to clean water and so on. By December the specific targets and links to other programmes had gone. "We're left with nothing but a vague framework and a wishlist," says Ben Wisner, a visiting professor of environmental studies at Oberlin College, Ohio. "We all began with high hopes for something substantial from Kobe. But under pressure from the American government - which doesn't want to be tied to a real programme for real action - we could end up with empty promises and wishful thinking. The people in the way whenever a real disaster happens, the poor, the weak, the hungry, deserve better." Salvano Briceno, of the UN inter-agency secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction - one of the architects of the conference - sees good things coming anyway. He wants humanitarian donors to earmark 10% of relief money after any disaster for steps to reduce future calamity. He wants to see a culture of prevention, at every level. It's just a matter of changing attitudes, and Kobe could help. "You may remember that 30 years ago nobody would think of disease prevention," he says. "Nowadays everybody knows that by eating better and taking more exercise, you can prevent illnesses. The same theme needs to be developed for natural hazards." Technology is not the problem. The problem is getting the message to the vulnerable, the people living on mud flats, in small villages, in shanty towns, in rebel-held areas. Peter Walker, once of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and now directing the Feinstein international famine centre at Tufts University, in Massachusetts, is worried that the Kobe resolution will do little to address questions of governance, globalisation, conflict, climate change and the globe's swelling cities, and if it does, there will be no targets set for states to reach: lots of rhetoric, but not much to be held accountable to. "That was indefensible before Christmas," he says. "But now it is near immoral."

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Reuters
AUTHOR: Elaine Lies
DATE: 18 January

Annan Stresses Tsunami Lessons at Disaster Meet

KOBE -- U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan urged the world on Tuesday to learn from the killer Asian tsunami, saying spending now could limit the loss of life and damage from inevitable natural disasters. More than 175,000 people were killed and millions left homeless by the Dec. 26 tsunami and pledges of emergency relief stand at more than \$7 billion. Investing smaller sums before disasters could reduce the toll such catastrophes take in lives and in money, Annan said at the start of a 5-day conference in the Japanese city of Kobe, which is marking the 10th anniversary of a quake that killed 6,433 people. "It's not enough to pick up the pieces," Annan said in a video message following a moment of silence for tsunami victims. "We must draw on every lesson we can to avoid such catastrophes in the future." At the top of the agenda for the Kobe conference is persuading wealthy donor nations to provide funds for developing countries, which often have more pressing daily needs, and ensuring that these promises are kept. "I would propose that about 10 percent of all funds spent as emergency aid should be spent for disaster risk reduction," said Jan Egeland, U.N. Emergency Relief coordinator. "I am acutely aware of how much is being spent on being fire brigades, putting plaster on the wounds," he added. Later, he told a news conference that the pool of donor nations should broaden to reflect a growing number of more wealthy countries, including those in Asia and the Gulf. But he steered away from criticizing increasingly wealthy China, saying that it was a special case as a donor nation that also had developing areas. The priority at the Kobe conference is the establishment of a tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean, similar to one set up in the Pacific after a 1960 quake in Chile triggered a wave along Japan's coast and killed more than 100 people. Thousands might have been spared in the December tsunami if warnings had reached countries such as Sri Lanka, India and far away Somalia before the wave struck. Japan, which has a long history of tsunami, has a warning system that uses a network of seismic stations and water-borne sensors to issue a warning within three minutes of a quake. Tokyo has pledged funds and its long expertise as a nation hit by 20 percent of the world's earthquakes. "As a result of our experience, we have learned many disaster reduction lessons we can share with the international community," Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi told a plenary session. MANY HURDLES Japan will take a role in the creation of a U.N. database on disaster recovery case studies as well as setting up training sessions and using overseas development aid, he said. Technology is only the first hurdle. Other challenges are getting the warning out to remote areas in less-developed countries, which may have only rudimentary communications systems, and teaching residents what to do when a warning is issued. Many people were killed, for example, when they went out to see the exposed sea bed as water drew back before the tsunami roared in. And risk is not only confined to rural areas, Egeland said, noting that many of the world's megacities -- defined as cities with a population of 10 million or more and a dense concentration of people and infrastructure, are also in danger from natural disasters such as earthquakes or flooding. "Perhaps the most frightening prospective would be to have a truly megadisaster in a megacity," Jan Egeland, the U.N. Director of Disaster Relief, told Reuters. "Then we could have not only a tsunami-style casualty rate as we have seen late last year, but we could see one hundred times that in a worst case."

END ITEM

MEDIUM: BBC

AUTHOR:

DATE: 18 January

World urged to learn from tsunami

An international conference on natural disasters has opened with calls on the world to heed the lessons of last month's Indian Ocean tsunami. The meeting held in Kobe in Japan, coincides with the 10th anniversary of the earthquake that ravaged the city. But delegates are expected to focus on the recent tsunami, which killed more than 160,000 people in 12 countries. UN humanitarian affairs chief Jan Egeland called for better protection for poor, vulnerable communities. The five-day meeting had been scheduled to take place before December's earthquake off Indonesia and the devastating waves it triggered. The 3,000 delegates in Kobe are expected to discuss ways to set up a tsunami warning system for the Indian Ocean, similar to the one that exists in the Pacific. Experts say countless lives could have been saved had such a system been in place. "The best way we can honour the dead is to protect the living," Mr Egeland said at the start of the meeting. Prevention - The BBC's Charles Scanlon in Kobe says that delegates recognise that technology alone will not be enough to mitigate the impact of future disasters. UN officials say the emphasis needs to be put on communities themselves so warnings can be effective at the local level. In 2002, 300 million people were affected by drought in India, and millions more by similar problems in Ethiopia and Zimbabwe. Flooding in China affected 190 million. Children need to be taught safety drills and hospitals, schools and health centres should be robust enough to withstand earthquakes and floods, the meeting heard. In a report issued ahead of the conference, the UN said that least 2.5 billion people had been affected by natural disasters over the past 10 years - an increase of 60% over the previous decade. Floods and earthquakes are the deadliest natural disasters, accounting for more than half of the total casualties, the report says. Asia is named as the continent most affected during the period, accounting for more than half the casualties and more than 90% of those injured, left homeless or needing emergency assistance. Numbers worldwide peaked in 2002, with millions affected by floods in Asia, and drought in India, Ethiopia and Zimbabwe. In India alone, 300 million people were affected across 16 states by the country's worst drought since 1987. In China, floods affected more than 190 million people. The UK's international development minister has called on government officials at the conference to boost spending on risk reduction. "Poorer countries have fewer resources to cope with disasters and so are more vulnerable," Gareth Thomas said, "yet measures are available now such as early warning systems that could save lives." The Kobe earthquake killed more than 6,400 of the city's residents.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Agence France Press

AUTHOR:

DATE: 18 January

Outspoken UN relief chief says 'newly rich' countries not donating enough

KOBE -- Jan Egeland, the outspoken UN relief chief, has accused "newly rich countries" of not showing enough generosity when giving foreign aid. "I find it strange that there are the same 10 to 15 major donors today as 10 years ago," Egeland, the undersecretary general for humanitarian affairs, told reporters at a UN conference on disaster reduction in Kobe, Japan. "I would expect more of the Asian continent, the Gulf, Eastern Europe and even Latin American countries," Egeland said. He said there should be less of a gap in foreign aid between "the newly rich and the old rich. "With more and more rich countries, we should be feeding all the children in the world," Egeland said. Asked about China's growing role as a donor, Egeland said

Beijing "can do more and is doing more" but said both China and India had large undeveloped areas that would be main national priorities. Egeland, a Norwegian, has become a leading figure in the massive relief operation after the December 26 tsunamis which battered the Indian Ocean countries. He famously ruffled feathers when he accused rich nations of being "stingy," a remark he later backtracked on amid an unprecedented rush of billions of dollars in government donations for the tsunami victims. Figures on foreign aid generosity are hotly contested, with Scandinavian countries coming out on top in terms of amount donated as a proportion of their total economic output. The United States comes in first in absolute monetary amount but slips to the bottom of the list of major industrialized countries when its contribution is set against the size of its economy. Washington contests the comparison, saying it does not take into consideration the vast amount of private-sector donations in the United States.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: DPA (German Press Agency)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 18 January 2005

Ten years after Kobe quake: U.N. disaster conference

TOKYO -- Ten years after an earthquake killed more than 6,300 people in Kobe, international delegates gathered Tuesday to discuss disaster prevention and a possible warning system for the Indian Ocean region. Much of the attention was expected to focus on the massive disaster of the December 26 tsunami in south Asia. Japanese Emperor Akihito, speaking at the opening of the U.N.- sponsored conference, said he hoped that Japan's knowledge and skills for preventing natural disasters, gained through its own experiences, would help diminish damages caused by natural disasters around the world. The death toll in the south Asian tsunami is expected to surpass 160,000. The emperor sent condolences to the victims. Twelve countries were hit by a savage wall of water launched by an underwater earthquake measuring 9 on the Richter scale off of Sumatra. During the conference, Japan announced measures to prevent natural disasters in which the creation of an international reconstruction assistance database. As a resource for responding to future calamities, the database will collect lessons and experiences from reconstruction efforts in the wake of past disasters such as the 1995 Kobe earthquake. "Various lessons the world learned through past disasters and for disaster prevention can be shared internationally," Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said in a speech explaining Japan's proposals. Koizumi reiterated the need for the global community to build a tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean in view of the vast damage sustained in coastal areas. "Japan will provide support to help build the tsunami warning mechanism on a bilateral basis and in cooperation with international agencies like UNESCO (U.N. Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization)," Koizumi said. The Japanese government also said in its package Tokyo will provide official development assistance (ODA) which would be used to reduce disasters in developing countries and help them foster human resources in the area. "Based on this initiative, Japan will actively, through ODA, promote disaster reduction cooperation to support self-help efforts and human resources development in developing countries," the government said in the package. The Japanese government also proposed establishing a UNESCO centre in Japan to deal with water hazards and their risk management for water-related disasters. More than 3,000 people from governmental and non-government organizations (NGOs) from 150 countries are expected to participate in the five-day conference in Kobe. U.N.

Undersecretary General for Humanitarian Affairs Jan Egeland officially opened the conference and U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan also gave a video message. Prime Minister Koizumi is expected to announce details of Japan's contribution at the conference, including grants in aid to cope with the damage from the tsunami. Japan has already pledged up to 500 million dollars in aid. Daily sessions will cover all angles of disaster-related issues. Organizers have added two special sessions on the December 26 tragedy. A technical session on feasible tsunami warning systems for the Indian Ocean region will take place Wednesday, followed by a plenary session Thursday for discussing the political process of establishing the system. On Tuesday it was proposed that December 26 be recognized as "International Tsunami Day" to remember the disaster in Indian Ocean. The conference date was suggested by the Japanese government to mark the 10th anniversary of the Kobe earthquake on January 17, 1995. The Kobe conference will mark the second U.N.-sponsored conference addressing natural disasters. The first conference was held in 1994 in the city of Yokohama in Kanagawa prefecture, next to Tokyo.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Swiss Info

AUTHOR:

DATE: 18 January

Disaster summit aims to tame nature's fury

The World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which runs until Saturday, is taking place in the Japanese city of Kobe, which was rocked by a killer earthquake in January 1995. "What we would like to see is a shift in the cultural approach to disasters in many countries," said Marco Ferrari, a member of the Swiss delegation. "This means integrating local and federal officials, as well as scientists and insurance companies, into a legal framework for risk reduction," he told swissinfo. "Only then can many countries take steps towards monitoring and early warning systems." Early warnings - The aim of the Kobe conference is to come up with a strategy and ten-year action plan to reduce the risks of natural hazards – such as earthquakes, floods and droughts – around the world. According to the United Nations emergency relief coordinator, Jan Egeland, these types of events affect as many, if not more, people than human conflicts. But unlike the impact of wars and fighting, Egeland says the consequences of nature's violence can often be averted. "We understand these [natural] hazards and there are ways to prepare communities and individuals to deal with them," Egeland said. The talks are expected to focus heavily on building up the resilience of nations and communities to disasters, such as the December 26 tsunami, which killed at least 150,000 people and left around five million people lacking basic services. The meeting was planned long before the killer waves struck Asian coastlines, but Ferrari says the tragedy underscores the fact that a lack of early warnings and preparedness can mean the difference between life and death. "Natural disasters will arise, earthquakes will continue and the results may be terrible," said Ferrari. "But we hope that the tsunami disaster will serve as a dramatic example that something could have been done, and should be done, to prevent such a loss of life." "It's not simply the fault of the affected countries," he added. "Everyone has a role to play in assuming responsibility for risk reduction, especially the international community." Perilous mountains - The vulnerability of island and coastal regions is likely to dominate the discussions but Switzerland is hoping to highlight the needs of mountainous areas as well. The Swiss National Platform for Natural Hazards (PLANAT) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) are due to give a thematic presentation based on the country's extensive experience

involving mountainous disasters, such as avalanches and landslides. The workshop is expected to use the example of the Valais region, where various natural hazards exist and where a number of major disasters have occurred in recent years, to outline Switzerland's disaster reduction policy. The Swiss framework is based on a "holistic" approach, involving prevention, response and recovery, as well as dialogue with disaster relief experts and affected populations. Ferrari said a key element of the session would be to highlight Swiss relations with other nations and the importance of information-sharing. "When it comes to avalanches and water-related issues, such as glacial melting or river flooding, the Swiss have quite a lot to share," said Ferrari. "These types of workshops also allow us to learn from the experiences of other countries and bring valuable knowledge back to Switzerland."

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Reuters

AUTHOR: Elaine Lies

DATE: 18 January

Disaster Looms for Megacities, UN Official Says

KOBE -- Earthquakes, floods and other natural disasters could kill millions in the world's teeming megacities and time is running out to prevent such a catastrophe, the United Nations point man on emergency relief said on Tuesday. Jan Egeland, the U.N. Director of Disaster Relief, said many of the world's megacities, including Tokyo, are extremely vulnerable to natural disasters and the poor were most at risk from a lack of investment and planning. "Perhaps the most frightening prospect would be to have a truly megadisaster in a megacity," he said on the first day of a disaster prevention conference in the Japanese city of Kobe, where an earthquake killed nearly 6,500 people a decade ago. "Then we could have not only a tsunami-style casualty rate as we have seen late last year, but we could see one hundred times that in a worst case." The five-day conference to mark the 10th anniversary of the Kobe quake is also aiming to draw lessons from last month's quake and tsunami that killed more than 175,000 people along Indian Ocean coastlines. Megacities have a population of 10 million or more and a dense concentration of people, many of them in slums. "Time is running short for some of those megacities in Asia, in Africa and in Latin America," Egeland said. "Some of the megacities are earthquake prone, others are prone to flooding, etcetra. We have to have city planning, we have to have development, we have to have investment in the poor areas, because the poor people now are the most vulnerable," he said. "There is still time to prevent that, and we hope that some attention could be given to the megacities and not just to the countryside, which we normally associate with tsunamis and with flooding and with drought." As the world's population continues to grow, so will the size of megacities across the globe, stretching resources and the ability to cope with disasters. Mega-Growth - According to U.N figures, the top five megacities now are the greater Tokyo area with 35.3 million people, Mexico City with 19 million, New York-Newark 18.5 million, Bombay 18.3 million and Sao Paulo 18.3 million. But by 2015, the United Nations estimates the populations of the top five will be: the greater Tokyo area at 36.2 million, Bombay 22.6 million, Delhi 21 million, Mexico City 20.6 million and Sao Paulo 20 million. Tokyo remains a great concern because of its high population, history of earthquakes and impact on the world economy if a major quake devastates the capital of the world's number 2 economy. Experts say a major quake is long overdue for Tokyo, which was flattened in 1923 by a quake and subsequent fires. Egeland also said that last month's tsunami, while tragic, could benefit developing nations over time by alerting wealthy donor nations to the importance of spending

small sums of money to save lives and property before disaster strikes. "It has really been a global eye-opener to the devastating impact of natural disasters," he said, adding that he hoped investment would not end when the drama of disaster had faded. "We have a momentum of understanding, and we have to use that as much as we can to get institutions going and get funds, not only for relief but also for early warning, for prevention and development," he said.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Deutsche Welle

AUTHOR:

DATE: 18 January

Message at UN Disaster Meeting: Be Prepared

KOBE -- As a UN conference on natural-disaster preventions got underway in Japan, a plan to create a global tsunami warning system was high on the agenda. Without the recent flooding catastrophe in South Asia, the UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction would have been just another appointment on the United Nations agenda, interesting mainly for experts. But now the eyes of the world are on Kobe, Japan, where 3000 experts and politicians from around the globe will meet through Jan. 22 to discuss the reduction of natural disasters. Saving lives - Since the late-December tsunami in the Indian Ocean, experts have acknowledged that while we can't prevent natural catastrophes altogether, we can do much more to mitigate their damages. The subject of disaster reduction, long ignored by many countries, has now been pushed to the fore. "I really hope that the public pressure will have an effect on the conference. Documents have been very vague up to now, since many governments generally don't want to make any commitment," said Irmgard Schwaetzer, chairwoman of the German Committee on Disaster Reduction. Following the South Asia tsunamis, the experts all agreed: An early warning system in the region would have saved countless lives. Concrete suggestions - A demand for early warning systems for natural catastrophes is nothing new, it was already voiced ten years ago, at the first large United Nations conference on disaster prevention. In addition, the United Nations had deemed the 1990s the Decade of National Catastrophe Prevention. Some of the countries represented in Kobe arrived with concrete prevention plans already in hand. Germany will actively campaign for a tsunami early warning system designed by German scientists. The €25 million (\$32.5 million) project is based on sensors and satellites which would detect earthquakes and calculate flood waves. Japan wants to situate a center for post-catastrophe reconstruction in the city of Kobe, itself flattened by an earthquake ten years ago, the governor of Hyogo prefecture said. Among its responsibilities would be to coordinate international aid, send experts to disaster-affected regions and oversee reconstruction. It would also serve as a center for global information campaigns. Not always expensive - "For early warning systems, we don't necessarily need to reinvent the wheel, but connect already existing elements," said Schwaetzer. For years, the Pacific has had a functioning system, which could be expanded, she said. "For example, there are gauging stations in Germany that could be expanded, with very little additional work, and connected to an early warning system for the Indian Ocean. The measures don't have to be very expensive; the coordination is the main factor," she said. Not only developing nations need improvement. The Elbe river flooding in 2002 showed how industrial nations, like Germany, could also benefit from better disaster-relief communications. "It is clear that communication between the states, the individual aid organizations, and even by us (the disaster relief committee), in a highly developed country, can fail. The reason for this is the complexity of

catastrophe-reduction planning. "It is more than just making ambulances available. Its about making disaster plans, getting early warning systems running, and training people how to evaluate a warning or a risk. Teaching people to be aware of danger," Schwaezer said. Great expectations - But conference goers are also wary of having overly high expectations. Experience shows that the more time has gone by following a catastrophe, the risk-awareness wanes. There are numerous examples of how preparation can save lives. For example, Bangladesh has had a program against tornadoes since the early 1970s. Vietnam has been planting robust mangrove trees along its coastline to stabilize the shoreline. And Vietnamese children as early as kindergarten, how to behave in a flood.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Kazinform (Kazhakstan)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 18 January

Int'l disaster reduction conference opens in Kobe

KOBE -- An international conference to discuss ways to reduce the impact of natural disasters on people and societies got under way Tuesday in Kobe, with the participation of more than 800 delegates from about 150 countries, Kazinform refers to Kyodo. The U.N. World Conference on Disaster Reduction aims to establish new guidelines that would help the international community as well as regions, countries, local governments and communities work on reducing damage caused by natural disasters. U.N. Undersecretary General for Humanitarian Affairs Jan Egeland officially opened the five-day conference. The opening ceremony also features speeches by Emperor Akihito and Yoshitaka Murata, the Japanese state minister for disaster management, as well as a video message from U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan. Later Tuesday, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi will attend an opening discussion session of the public forum segment before making a statement at an intergovernmental plenary session. Many sessions will be held daily covering virtually all kinds of disaster-related issues. Organizers have added two special sessions focusing on the Dec. 26 tsunami in the Indian Ocean that killed more than 160,000 people. A technical session for considering what kind of early tsunami warning system is feasible in the Indian Ocean region will take place Wednesday, followed by a plenary session Thursday for discussing the more political process of establishing the system. Delegates are set to adopt a set of documents on the final day of the conference Saturday, including a "Hyogo Declaration" in which participants are expected to pledge to work to reduce damage caused by disasters worldwide. Other documents include an action plan for the coming decade in addition to a review of the Yokohama Strategy, adopted at the first World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction held in Yokohama in May 1994. Egeland said Monday he hopes that the action plan to be adopted in Kobe includes a concrete timetable on how to reach the goal of making communities around the globe less vulnerable to disaster hazards and that disaster risk measures will be integrated into the development policies of all countries. "I have high hopes that the Kobe conference will really make a difference," Egeland said. "After the tsunami, I think everybody expects concrete results coming out of Kobe, not only in the tsunami warning...but in terms of disaster risk reduction in general," he said in a panel discussion at an international symposium held on the eve of the conference's opening. The conference will consist of various kinds of sessions, including government-level talks, technical discussions by experts on various disaster-related themes, and workshops as well as exhibition and poster booths open to the public. In addition to state

representatives, officials of the United Nations, more than 10 U.N. agencies, and many international and regional organizations as well as nongovernmental organizations are participating in the Kobe conference. Japan proposed hosting the conference in the city which is located in the Hanshin region. Monday marked the 10th anniversary of the Great Hanshin Earthquake, which killed 6,433 people and was the biggest natural disaster in Japan after World War II.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Kazinform (Kazhakstan)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January

150 countries of the world unite to coordinate the 10-year plan on natural disaster aftermath reduction

KOBE -- Three weeks after a devastating Indian Ocean tsunami killed at least 160,000 people, the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) opened today in Kobe, Japan – site of a disastrous earthquake that claimed 40,000 lives 10 years ago – with a clarion call for better measures to mitigate the effects of natural hazards. As it was said on the official website of the UN, “all disaster-prone countries should adopt clear, goal-oriented disaster reduction policies and action plans underpinned by dedicated structures and resources,” UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Jan Egeland told over 4,000 participants from more than 150 countries, urging them to turn commitments into action and increase funding. At the top of the agenda is a tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean, which experts say could have saved scores of thousands of lives when gigantic waves from an undersea earthquake battered a dozen countries on 26 December, injuring more than half a million people beyond the death toll and leaving 5 million others in desperate need of basic services and at risk of deadly epidemics. “We must draw and act on every lesson we can, and prevent such tragedies from occurring in the future,” Secretary-General Kofi Annan said in a videotaped message after the conference opened with a minute of silence in memory of those who perished in last month’s disaster. The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has already laid out plans for a warning system, including deep water buoys, tide gauges and a regional tsunami alert centre at a cost of \$30 million to be operational for the Indian Ocean by June 2006, expanding worldwide a year later. The system would alert people in coastal regions in a tsunami’s path to evacuate hours before the devastating waves struck. In 1968 UNESCO’s intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission launched a successful International Tsunami Warning System for the Pacific, presently the only one in the world. But tsunamis will not be the only disaster high on the agenda of the five-day conference as it draws up a 10-year global action plan to mitigate the worst effects of other catastrophes, too, such as hurricanes and quakes, through early warning systems, quake-proof buildings, accelerated response units and other measures to reduce the toll. “Technology is not a cure-all. From Singapore to South Africa, experience shows us that people, not hardware, must be at the centre of any successful disaster warning and preparedness measure,” Mr. Egeland said, stressing the need for disaster education. “Children everywhere should be learning about living more safely with the natural hazards around them, as a part of their basic life skills education.” He proposed new funding, recommending that countries earmark a minimum of 10 per cent of the billions spent on disaster relief for disaster risk reduction. Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi pledged his Government’s support in enhancing regional cooperation and promoting partnerships to help build a global culture of disaster

prevention while Emperor Akihito, referring to Japan's own long-standing expertise in disaster reduction, outlined the need to cross natural boundaries to assist more vulnerable communities in preparing themselves. World Food Program Executive Director James T. Morris, for example, is slated to address the gathering on measures to augment emergency preparedness for food relief, while the Director of the Office for Outer Space Affairs, Sergio Camacho-Lara, will highlight the important role of space-based technologies in managing natural disasters. OOSA is playing a key role in facilitating capacity-building in developing countries to enable them to use space technology during all phases of disaster management – from early warning to disaster reduction, rescue and rehabilitation.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Kazinform

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January

Kazakhstan Emergency Minister urges formation of the Central-Asian Coordination Center on Prompt Response to Disasters

KOBE -- At the world conference on reduction of natural disaster aftermath which is being held in Kobe, Japan, Kazakhstan suggested forming on its territory a transit base for international humanitarian actions and the Central-Asian Coordination Center on Prompt Response to Disasters. Minister on Emergency Situations of Kazakhstan Mukhambet Kopeyev moved this motion delivering his speech at the world forum. The coordination center is called to provide early reporting about disasters, exchange of experience and use of advanced achievements of countries in prevention of catastrophes. In his speech, the Minister reported full support of the ideas of the conference. The Minister informed of the decree on ratification of the plan of Kazakhstan's preparedness to natural disasters. Minister Kopeyev condoled upon the tragic consequence of the earthquake resulted in disastrous tsunami and death of tens of thousands of people on behalf of Kazakhstanis. After the conference is completed on 22 January, there will be passed the Declaration on Future Ensuring Security Worldwide.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Financial Times

AUTHOR: David Pilling

DATE: 19 January 2005

UN moves to forge worldwide tsunami alert plan

KOBE -- The United Nations will today try to fashion a unified plan for a global tsunami early warning system amid signs of disarray as several countries and agencies compete to take a lead in the high-profile initiative. Although the UN publicly welcomed proposals from Japan, Germany, Australia, the US, China, India and France to play a leading role in organising a warning system, privately some officials expressed concern that too many states and agencies were vying for the limelight. "We are trying to knock some heads together. Half a dozen countries and half a dozen international organisations are in danger of doing the same thing," said Susan Williams, an official with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. The competition over the warning system echoes the confusion in the days following the tsunami disaster as governments and agencies rushed to the

scene, anxious to show the public they were doing all they could. It took more than a week of chaos before the UN finally won acceptance of its role in co-ordinating relief operations on the ground. United Nations officials insist the UN is the only organisation with the capacity, the mandate and the legitimacy to play this co-ordination role. Experts attending the biggest gathering on disaster reduction, which opened yesterday in Kobe, Japan, said a basic system could be up and running in the Indian Ocean by June 2006 and a global system, including the vulnerable Caribbean, by June 2007. Junichiro Koizumi, Japan's prime minister, was one of the quickest to seize on the issue, announcing days after the disaster that a framework for an early warning system would be drawn up in Kobe and offering to help fund the Dollars 30m (Euros 23m, Pounds 16m) cost. President George W. Bush has said the US wants to play a role in co-ordinating a system, while China and India have both announced international gatherings on tsunami warning systems for later this month. Marcus Oxley, disaster management director for Tearfund, a UK-based charity, said: "I don't mind if Australia and Japan or anybody else wants to contribute. But let's not duplicate and replicate." Jan Egeland, UN head of humanitarian affairs, said he was confident the UN would be able to co-ordinate a rational response from the multiple offers. "Before the tsunami, disaster prevention was a special-interest-group issue and now it is a head of state issue," he said. More troubling was the possibility that the world would neglect more common natural hazards, including hurricanes, drought and plagues of locusts, he said. He and other experts said it would be better to create a comprehensive warning system for all kinds of disasters. Mr Egeland proposed that 10 per cent of the Dollars 4bn-Dollars 5bn spent each year on disaster relief should be earmarked for disaster prevention. GTZ, the German agency for technical co-operation, estimated that only 2 per cent of disaster-related aid was spent on prevention. Mr Egeland yesterday broadened his now infamous attack on "stingy" nations, to newly wealthy countries, including the Gulf states. In spite of what he called an economic revolution over the past 15 years that had seen the list of wealthy nations swell to 40 or 50, the top 10 donors remained the same, he said. "If oil prices are Dollars 40 a barrel it means that some countries must have a lot of money," he said. "We are getting new donors on board, but we are not getting them on board as substantively as we would like." The contribution of many relatively well-off countries was "very very low", he said.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: The Guardian
AUTHOR: Justin McCurry
DATE: 19 January 2005

Pressure grows for wave warnings

KOBE -- Rich states yesterday came under renewed pressure to provide countries around the Indian Ocean with the early-warning system they lacked when huge waves killed more than 160,000 people on Boxing Day. Experts believe a warning system of the type used by Japan and the US in the Pacific Ocean for several decades would have saved countless lives had it been in place. Aid groups called on participants to put impoverished countries at the centre of the five-day UN world conference on disaster reduction in the Japanese city of Kobe. "Poor men, women and children do not have the power to influence decisions that would make them less vulnerable or strengthen their resilience," said Roger Yates of ActionAid International. Those failures of governance that every day exclude poor people from national and international priorities also exclude them from measures which could protect them when disaster strikes." Japan, no stranger to the destruction caused by

earthquakes and tsunamis, is expected to be instrumental in providing the know-how for a warning system. Yesterday the prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi, said Japan, which has pledged \$ 500m (@270m) to the relief effort, would run training courses on early-warning technology. Delegates in Kobe will spend the next few days discussing a range of options, including a Unesco proposal to set up a warning system costing \$ 30m that would be in place by the middle of next year. But UN officials have made it clear that long-term recovery will require extra measures, such as better breakwaters and sea walls, hazard maps showing vulnerable areas, and evacuation routes and shelters. "What we need to have here is a strong commitment by countries and agencies," said Jan Egeland, the UN undersecretary general for humanitarian affairs. Mr Egeland, who criticised the US's initial response to the tsunami disaster as stingy, said he hoped all disaster-prone regions would be equipped with early-warning systems in the next 10 years. Japan also said it would direct overseas aid towards reducing the impact of natural disasters. "If disaster reduction continues to be kept separate from development and reconstruction planning, it will be impossible to break the vicious cycle of disaster and poverty," a government statement said. links - www.unisdr.org/wcdr World Conference on Disaster Reduction; em-dat.net Emergency Disasters Database; guardian.co.uk/tsunami

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Agence France Press

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January 2005

US tries to remove climate change references in UN disaster talks

KOBE -- The United States, which opposes the Kyoto protocol on global warming, is trying to remove references to climate change in UN talks aimed at setting up a disaster early warning system, a US official said Wednesday. The US has voiced objections to "multiple" references to climate change in drafting documents for the global conference in Kobe, Japan on disaster reduction, said Mark Lagon, deputy assistant secretary in the State Department bureau of international organization affairs. He said the United States believed climate change was a "well-known" controversy and that there were "other venues" to discuss it. "Our desire is that this does not distract from this process," Lagon said. He said other countries including Australia and Iran had also "raised concerns" about references to climate change. "The US is not the only country asking questions about climate references," he said. "This is not the dominant controversy" at the conference, Lagon said. "But there are different views." US President George W. Bush rejected the Kyoto protocol on global warming after he took office in 2001, saying it would cost US industry too much. The protocol calls for emission cuts of six key gasses. It comes into force in February after the agreement of Russia. The US stance has infuriated Europe and other allies in the industrialized world which have signed up for Kyoto. Some 4,500 experts and officials from around 150 countries are meeting in Kobe and are expected to make a list of targets to be met by 2015 on ways to reduce the risks of disasters. A top issue at the conference is how to set up an early warning system for tsunamis, amid outrage that Indian Ocean nations had no way of knowing about the giant waves that battered their coasts on December 26 killing more than 168,000 people. Lagon said the United States was fully committed to helping build an early warning system. But experts here have called for measures to reduce the risks of all disasters and cited global warming as a concern. UN relief chief Jan Egeland in his opening address Tuesday to the five-day conference said that in addition to natural disasters, "We

now face threats of our own collective making: global warming, environmental degradation and uncontrolled urbanization."

END ITEM

MEDIUM: RIA Novosti (Russia)

Author:

Date: 19 January 2005

RUSSIA SUPPORTS IDEA OF NATURAL DISASTER EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

KOBE -- Russia is willing to actively participate in a global effort to lessen the negative impact of natural disasters, announced head of the Russian delegation at the world conference held in the Japanese city of Kobe, vice-president of the conference, head of the international department under the Russian Ministry of Emergencies Yuri Brazhnikov. "Russia is willing to share its experience and participate in the development of the global natural disaster early warning and monitoring system, including the use of space technologies. The natural disaster that recently affected South East Asian countries clearly showed the need for such a system," Mr. Brazhnikov said. He emphasized the use of advanced technologies to assess the scale and consequences of catastrophes in order to coordinate global relief efforts. One of the technologies is the so-called Global Radius technology used by Russian rescue experts in Sri Lanka. The UN specialists used a Bo-105 helicopter, delivered to the disaster zone by an IL-76 transport plane, to conduct reconnaissance and damage assessment flights. Mr. Brazhnikov also reported that Russia pays special attention to the development of the natural disaster awareness culture among the population. All participants of the conference spoke about the necessity of informing and educating the population on issues of coping with the consequences of natural disasters. It is especially important considering that the number of natural disasters and industrial accidents has been steadily growing recently. The ministry official appealed to the participants of the conference to pay closer attention to the danger of industrial accidents in the modern world, especially with the appearance of a new common threat - international terrorism. "That is why we should not limit our efforts to dealing with consequences of natural disasters, but should include the entire spectrum of threats that either initiate or increase the negative effects of natural disasters," he underlined. Mr. Brazhnikov added that Russia supports the initiatives put forward by China, Japan and Germany to create a natural disaster early warning system in South East Asia.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Reuters

AUTHOR: Elaine Lies

DATE: 19 January 2005

Experts launch efforts for tsunami warning system

KOBE -- As the Asian tsunami focuses world attention on natural disasters, experts on Wednesday called for an early warning system as soon as possible to help to halve deaths from such catastrophes over the next decade. While too late for the more than 175,000 people who died in the massive Dec. 26 tsunami, such a system for the Indian Ocean is top of the agenda at a United Nations-sponsored conference this week in the Japanese city of Kobe. "Natural hazards will always occur, but they don't need to turn into disasters if the proper measures are taken. There is a heavy

cost in doing nothing," said Michel Jarraud, head of the U.N. World Meteorological Organisation. As the world grieved and mobilised support for tsunami victims it was important to draw lessons for the future, said officials taking part in a first session on the warning system. Koichiro Matsuura, director-general of UNESCO, which is coordinating efforts on a tsunami warning system, said he hoped an Indian Ocean system could be operational by the middle of 2006 and a global system a year after that. Natural disasters such as floods, storms, earthquakes and tsunamis have killed some 600,000 people over the last decade. "We believe that we can significantly reduce the number of people who die through proper prevention measures," said Jarraud. "Our objective is to halve this number during the next decade." SPEED IS NEEDED - But officials warned that action must be taken now if such targets are to be met. "In a few months the interest in tsunami warning may fade," said Peter Pissierssens, head of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO. "We're really trying to get the train out of the station now while the interest is high." Japan is the site of some 20 percent of the world's earthquakes -- including the Kobe earthquake that killed nearly 6,500 people a decade ago -- and which have also left a history of devastating tsunamis. It has put its experience to good use in setting up a tsunami warning system, which was put to use on Wednesday when such a warning was issued for a group of islands south of Tokyo after an earthquake off the eastern coast. Japan is also part of the Hawaii-based Pacific Tsunami Warning Network, an international system set up after a devastating 1960 earthquake in Chile triggered tidal waves that killed more than 100 in Japan. This network is set to be a model for the system in the Indian Ocean. No matter how good the technology is, however, nothing can be done without communications systems to get the information out and without teaching people what to do when a warning is issued. People must also be taught that damage to the environment can trigger natural disasters, Klaus Toepfer, head of the U.N. Environment Programme, told Reuters. Destruction of coral reefs and mangrove forests in some areas struck by the tsunami may have worsened the devastation of the wave, prompting efforts to replant mangroves in some nations. "You have to use the environment (to help prevent) natural disasters," he told Reuters. "The conviction has grown that we need the integration of nature in the early warning system."

END ITEM

MEDIUM: DPA (German Press Agency)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January 2005

UNESCO expects early-warning tsunami system by 2006

KOBE -- UNESCO expects a tsunami early-warning system to be installed in the Indian Ocean region by June 2006, but experts attending the World Conference on Disaster Reduction warned Wednesday that such expectations may be too high. UNESCO said the early-warning tsunami system would later be expanded to other world regions such as the Caribbean. Patricio Bernal, Secretary General of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, said however, that an effective warning system required "long-term efforts aimed at teaching people about tsunami and at increasing awareness of them". That was a long process, he said. Experts will meet initially on March 3 for a successive four-day conference in Paris to discuss proposals from Germany, Japan and other countries for a warning system. A conclusive tsunami warning concept will be agreed on at another conference scheduled for July with the objective of enhancing pre-existing technical instruments swiftly. Countries bordering a tsunami-endangered region could then decide whether

to establish a warning system themselves. In the past, UNESCO has frequently pointed to the necessity of a tsunami warning system, but only few countries bordering the Indian Ocean had expressed interest. Delegates at a special tsunami conference following the catastrophe on December 26 agreed that countries bordering the Indian Ocean would have to be individually responsible for such a warning system. Among other things, such a warning system would have to reach people in all corners and in villages also. As it could take six months to three years for an early-warning tsunami system to become fully operational in the Indian Ocean region, UNESCO would have to ensure international coordination, they said. An expert at the conference in Kobe said that an interim assessment had noted an unprecedented international readiness for cooperation as a consequence of the tsunami disaster. At the same time, the global character of the tsunami had become clear. Precautions against natural catastrophes would have to become part of sustainable development, they said. Participants at the conference have repeatedly pointed to the necessity of long-term awareness in the afflicted countries. However, that was in danger of dwindling after the crises period.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Agence France Presse

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January 2005

UNESCO set to coordinate competing bids for Asian tsunami warning system

KOBE -- United Nations officials said the world body is attempting to coordinate the construction of a tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean, amid the rush of competing proposals and following the Asian tsunami tragedy. The UN science agency UNESCO, which is spearheading the warning system project, said more focused talks need to be held, as the UN disaster reduction conference in the Japanese city of Kobe continues -- attended by 4,500 experts and officials from 150 countries. 'Right now we have several proposals which are completely uncoordinated by different countries,' said Patricio Bernal, head of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission. 'What we need to do is coordinate them,' he said. Germany, one of the top donors to tsunami-hit countries, with a pledge of 500 mln eur, yesterday became the latest nation to offer its know-how to build a system. German research minister Edelgard Bulmahn told the Kobe conference that, in September, Berlin will send out buoys equipped with a satellite Global Positioning System (GPS), while setting instruments at the bottom of the Indian Ocean to enable the system to be launched. Germany claims the system, which has an initial cost of 20 mln eur, will be compatible with other technology. Meanwhile, Japan, the US and Australia have also offered their bespoke systems to predict tsunamis, according to delegates in Kobe. Bernal said his commission will hold two meetings within the next 60 days, one in Paris in March and the other as yet to be organised, in efforts to choose a suitable system for development. He hopes a final decision will be made at a meeting of the commission in July, enabling work to begin and to eventually meet a deadline, set for sometime in mid-2006 by UNESCO, allowing the system to be up and running.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Agence France Presse

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January 2005

UN announces global disaster alert system, but obstacles remain

KOBE -- The United Nations announced Wednesday it would set up a global system to predict disasters, but differences remained on whose technology would be used amid a rush of offers after Asia's tsunami tragedy. UN agencies in a joint statement at a global conference in Kobe, Japan said the world body's experts would create a system to reduce the risk of disasters amid outrage that Indian Ocean nations had no warning when their coasts were battered last month. "The new program will bring safety, security and peace of mind. Millions of people worldwide owe their lives and livelihood to effective early warning systems," said Salvano Briceno, director of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. But the announcement was largely symbolic, with an official at the UN science agency UNESCO, which is spearheading the warning system project, acknowledging that more focused talks were needed. "Right now we have several proposals which are completely uncoordinated by different countries. What we need to do is coordinate them," said Patricio Bernal, head of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission. He said his group would hold two meetings within 60 days, with one in Paris in March and the other yet to be organized, in hopes of picking a tsunami system with which to move forward. Bernal hoped a decision could be finalized at a meeting of his commission in July so work could begin and the system could be running by mid-2006, the target date set by UNESCO. Bernal, asked whether all nations would agree to work together on the tsunami warning system, said, "At a technical level, yes." On a political level "that could be a little more difficult", he said. In another sign of politics entering the conference, the United States said it was trying to take out "multiple" references in the final declaration that referred to climate change. The United States, which is at odds with much of the industrialized world by opposing the Kyoto protocol on global warming, believes there are "other venues" to discuss the controversy, State Department official Mark Lagon said, adding that Washington supported an early warning system. Lagon, along with UN experts and most delegates, stressed that a global warning system needed to take into account all potential disasters and not just tsunamis. The Kobe conference is also expected to issue a set of goals to be met by 2015 to reduce the risks of all natural disasters, with UN relief chief Jan Egeland pushing the countries to set a faster timeframe. Key donors have offered their own technology to monitor the Indian Ocean amid the outpouring of billions of dollars in aid following the tsunamis which killed more than 168,000 people. Germany, one of the top pledgers to tsunami-hit countries at 500 million euros (650 million dollars), said here Tuesday that it would send out satellite-powered buoys and set instruments below the water so its program could run quickly if chosen. Germany boasted that its system, which has an initial cost of 20 million euros, would be compatible with other technology. Japan, the United States and Australia have also offered their own systems to predict tsunamis, according to delegates here. Michel Jarraud, head of the UN World Meteorological Organization, voiced confidence that any hiccups in setting up the tsunami warning system would be cleared up. "I think that what we see is natural that after a major disaster there is an enormous amount of goodwill," Jarraud said. "There may be initially be bit of cooperation ... but I believe that afterward there will be more cooperation," he said.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: InterPress Service
AUTHOR: Suvendrini Kakuchi
DATE: 19 January 2005

TSUNAMI IMPACT: There's More to Disaster Mitigation Than a Warning System - NGOs

KOBE -- Non-governmental organisations are worried that important aspects of global disaster reduction would be overlooked at an international conference as countries and agencies jostle to take the lead in a high-profile tsunami early warning system. "There is a huge response from the international community to never repeat the tsunami disaster by creating a warning system. But there is less support for community based programmes for disaster mitigation," Markhu Niskala, secretary general of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, told IPS at the sidelines of the U.N.-organised World Conference on Disaster Reduction. Over 4,000 delegates are at this biggest gathering on disaster reduction, which opened here on Tuesday - in the aftermath of the Dec. 26 Indian Ocean tsunami that killed over 160,000 in South and South-east Asia. According to the Red Cross, disaster mitigation must also focus on community-based loss reduction strategies ranging from public education campaigns focusing on what communities need to do to become more disaster resistant, to school-based programs and efforts to educate government officials in local communities. Jonathan Rout, an Indian field worker in the Churches Auxiliary for Social Action based in New Delhi, said disaster prevention in rural poor societies can only be achieved by long-term strategies that involve the local communities. "The warning system is just one aspect of preventing another disaster," he said. "But people tend to forget that technology alone cannot prevent disasters. It must be complimented with community-based efforts." "The danger now is that there will be not enough funds going into rural-based projects to better prepare vulnerable communities," added the field worker who took time off from doing emergency relief work in India's southern coast of Tamil Nadu - where over 8,800 died when the tsunami hit -- to attend the conference. In a briefing paper circulated before the conference the World Bank warned that the problem in developing countries often comes down to making difficult development choices from among the many competing demands. "Disaster mitigation, because it is a periodic need rather than a constant one, tends to lose out to other priorities - especially once the disaster has fallen out of the international media and the immediate relief needs have been met," said the Bank. The Bank stressed that policies and actions involving communities that are intended to reduce the impact of the next disaster, must be an integral part of a strategy of both recuperation and pre-disaster planning. Nonetheless the conference organisers have set their top priority as the construction of an early warning system for ravaged nations in the Indian Ocean with U.N. officials insisting on a central role in coordinating the expertise and setting up the system. "We are confident that an initial early warning system can be in place by July next year given the technology that we already have," said Patrico Bernal, executive secretary of the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission which coordinates a tsunami warning system in the Pacific. Bernal said the system from the Pacific would later extend globally to cover other oceans utilising specialist technology already owned by India, for instance, that has state-of-the-art weather forecasting systems and Germany that is spearheading an ambitious warning mechanism based on space science. He pointed out that the challenge now faced at the conference is to provide the platform that will coordinate these proposals -- taking into consideration the key importance of entailing a smooth regional commitment to work with each other. "The weakest link is not technical but political. Success can only be achieved if participating governments are able to make their own correct assessments and evacuation programs once the warnings have been sent by the new tsunami monitoring system," Bernal explained. The jostling among governments to play a leading role in the tsunami early warning system began on Tuesday when Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said his government was willing to set up a framework, drawn up in Kobe, and offer help with the 30 million U.S. dollar cost.

The U.S. also wants to play a role in coordinating a system, while China and India have both announced international gatherings on tsunami warning systems for later this month. Marcus Oxley, disaster management director for Tearfund, a Britain-based charity, said: "I don't mind if Australia and Japan or anybody else wants to contribute. But let's not duplicate and replicate." UNESCO (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation) plans two meetings in Paris, the first in early March, to look at all the proposals, find common ground and work toward a single system. "It is important to ensure the Indian Ocean warning system be collectively owned by the countries in the region," said Laura Kong, a scientist in the UNESCO team.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Financial Times

AUTHOR: David Pilling

DATE: 20 January 2005

Millions at risk in megacity "death traps"

KOBE -- An increasing number of the world's inhabitants are living in megacity "death traps", exposing concentrated populations to the biggest collective risks in human history, a conference on disaster prevention will hear today. The meeting in Kobe, Japan, coming weeks after the Indian Ocean tragedy in which more than 220,000 died, has inevitably been dominated by talk of risk to mainly rural coastal communities and the need for a global tsunami warning system. But the world's exploding urban population, mostly in poor countries, meant an increasing number of people faced catastrophic risk from earthquakes, floods and epidemics in poorly planned cities with inadequate emergency services, experts said. Michel Jarraud, secretary-general of the World Meteorological Organisation, said: "More and more megacities (with populations above 10m) are developing in coastal regions. That means there's a growing fraction of the global population and growing concentrations of people living in areas of high risk." Jan Egeland, United Nations head of humanitarian affairs, added: "We have millions of people now who are living in death traps in huge, densely populated slum areas on fault lines or in flood-prone areas. If things go badly wrong, you could have the worst catastrophes in human history." By 2015, the world's top 15 cities will have a combined population of 302m, according to figures from Munich Re, the German reinsurer, which recently produced a report on what it called the "mega-risks" associated with huge cities. That is 50m more than in 2000, and 220m more than in 1950, when only New York had a population of above 10m. Of 15 cities with populations above 14m in 2015, only three - Tokyo, New York and Los Angeles - are in countries classified as high income. Of the remainder, eight are in Asia, including Seoul with 22.8m, Mumbai with 22.6m and Dhaka with 17.9m. Latin America has three megacities and Africa has one, Lagos. Peter Hoppe, a meteorologist at Munich Re, said uncontrollable urbanisation was greatly increasing risk: "There are huge cities without the infrastructure to provide security in a disaster." He said natural disasters had increased dramatically over the past 50 years, suggesting there was a man-made element to such catastrophes. "We have clear indications that the number of events and the size of losses is rising," he said. Mr Jarraud said climate change was contributing to the number of meteorological and hydrological disasters, which together accounted for 90 per cent of natural catastrophes. Aid officials said poor building regulations and weak rescue services made concentrated populations extremely vulnerable. In Mexico City and even in Kobe, which was struck by an earthquake 10 years ago, hospitals collapsed because of tremors. The UN is urging that all buildings designated as safe havens, including

hospitals and schools, be built to withstand severe natural disasters. In terms of insured risk, Tokyo is by far the world's most disaster-prone city because of its huge concentration of wealth and population in a highly active earthquake zone. Munich Re gives it a risk index of 710 against 167 for its nearest rival, San Francisco. Poorer cities figure less prominently in Munich Re's risk index because of their relative lack of insurable assets. Even so, Manila, Dhaka, Mumbai, Shanghai and Beijing all make the top 50.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: BBC

AUTHOR:

DATE: 20 January

Asian tsunami alert system backed

KOBE -- Donor countries and nations affected by the Asian tsunami disaster have agreed the UN should begin work on an early warning system in the Indian Ocean. UN agencies said they were ready to start work immediately and that a basic system could be ready in 12-18 months. The agreement came at a conference on disaster prevention in the Japanese city of Kobe. Meanwhile, Indonesia said it had received pledges of \$1.7bn (£900m) in tsunami aid from donors for 2005. Economic Affairs Minister Aburizal Bakrie told journalists after a meeting of the Consultative Group on Indonesia that \$1.2bn was in the form of grants and \$500m in the form of soft loans, mostly for the worst-hit Aceh region. The number of people known to have died in the disaster has now reached 220,000. Life-saving - The warning system project will be led, in the initial stages, by the UN agency Unesco, with millions of dollars already pledged by Japan, the EU and others. It is yet to be decided exactly who will contribute what, but a network of high-tech buoys anchored to the ocean floor and linked to a regional communications centre will be needed. The US, Germany and Australia have already offered their own technology. Japan has agreed to provide some form of cover in the meantime with information from its own sensors. A BBC correspondent in Kobe, Charles Scanlon, says there is a recognition at the conference that tens of thousands of lives could have been saved if the system had been operational before the 26 December Asian tsunami. Officials agreed, however, that the biggest challenge would be at the local level - how to communicate warnings of danger to isolated coastal communities. "Early warning systems will only succeed if the people most at risk who are central to the design of a system are able to receive and act upon the warnings," said Ian Wilderspin, a representative of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: The Guardian

AUTHOR: Justin McCreery

DATE: 20 January 2005

Climate Disaster plan talks stalled

KOBE -- Negotiations over a disasters action plan stalled yesterday when the US demanded that references to climate change as a cause of natural calamities be removed from the final document. Australia, Canada and the US requested changes in the action plan - aimed at avoiding another disaster like the Indian Ocean tsunamis which led to more than 160,000 deaths - to be adopted at the end of the week at the

UN's World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan. Citing differences in world opinion over the causes of climate change and the enforcement of the Kyoto Protocol, a US official said the demand for the changes was made to enable delegates to concentrate on mitigating the effects of natural disasters. The EU is insisting that climate change be mentioned in the final document but talks failed to get agreement. Aid groups were frustrated at the attempts to water down the document's language. "You would have expected a surge of enthusiasm after what happened in the Indian Ocean," said Sarah La Trobe, of the relief charity Tearfund.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: DPA (German Press Agency)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 20 January 2005

U.N. to spearhead tsunami warning system

KOBE -- The U.N. should start development of an early warning system in the Indian Ocean, nations affected by the Asian tsunami agreed on Thursday at a disaster prevention conference in Kobe. India, Thailand and Indonesia have all proposed establishing tsunami warning centres, however, experts say any warning system needs to be developed at an international level. With the neutral authority of the U.N. spearheading the project systematic participation will be best achieved, Hans Joachim Daerr, head of the German delegation, told Deutsche Presse-Agentur dpa. "Only an ocean-wide system makes sense," said Daerr. A basic system could be ready in 12 to 18 months, said U.N. agencies at the conference. A network of high-tech buoys anchored to the ocean floor and linked to a regional communications centre will be needed. Millions of dollars have already been pledged by Japan and the European Union for the system and the U.S., Germany, Japan and Australia have already offered up their own technology for its development. The death toll from the December 26 earthquake and resulting tsunami has jumped to 226,000 after Indonesia declared 50,000 missing as dead.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Agence France Press

AUTHOR:

DATE: 20 January

UN put in charge of coordinating dueling offers for tsunami warning system

KOBE -- The United Nations was Thursday put in charge of sorting out differences among countries offering to build a tsunami early warning system after a flood of proposals in the wake of the Indian Ocean tragedy. Salvano Briceno, head of the UN disaster reduction group, said a system to warn of giant waves in the Indian Ocean was still on track to be running in 12 to 18 months. A draft of the common statement of the 150 countries meeting in Kobe, Japan agreed the United Nations "would integrate regional disaster reduction strategies." But the draft called for two more meetings: one of ministers on January 28-29 on the tsunami-hit Thai island of Phuket to review the Kobe conference and one in Bonn in early 2006 to review implementation. Germany, Japan, the United States and Australia have all offered to put their technology to use in the Indian Ocean after the waves smashed into 11 nations' coasts on December 26 killing nearly a quarter of a million people. In addition to the four countries, which are the biggest donors to tsunami-hit countries,

Briceno said offers at least to contribute to an early warning system had also come from India, China, France, Thailand and Indonesia. "They all have capacities they want to make available," Briceno told reporters. "So the idea is that we will assess with those affected countries and the donor countries the role with which each of them can play," he said. He said millions of dollars in government contributions were being sent to UN agencies to start with implementation. "We do believe in 12 to 18 months there should be a basic capacity" on a warning system, Briceno said. Shuzen Tanigawa, Japan's senior vice foreign minister, indicated frustration and said Tokyo would press ahead with its system despite the calls for further talks. "I think we are the most advanced (in tsunami warnings) so we don't have to wait," Tanigawa said. "After the tsunami something has to be done and you can't wait until there is a consensus. So some part of it has to be started, and it has to be coordinated," he said. A person privy to the closed-door talks described the atmosphere as heated with delegates carefully choosing every word in the declaration. Separately, a Japanese official said negotiators were still working on the document into Thursday evening. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies warned that the Kobe conference could end up failing in its target of reducing the risks of disasters. "There is still time for a positive outcome but there is a very real danger that all we will get is rhetoric," said Eva Von Oelreich, the Federation's disaster preparedness head. The five-day conference, which closes Saturday, has drawn some 4,500 experts and officials with half of them registering after the tsunamis. The United States, which has rejected the Kyoto protocol on global warming, said it objected to "multiple references" to climate change in the documents. Briceno said an agreement was reached to mention climate change only once. He said the push to refer repeatedly to climate change had come "mostly from small island nations" which feel threatened by global warming and the resulting rise in water levels. The conference here had opened with a call by UN relief chief Jan Egeland for greater commitment by donor nations to disaster prevention. Egeland on Thursday fell ill with a fever, an aide said. Germany has said it will send satellite-equipped buoys to the Indian Ocean so its system could get off the ground immediately if accepted. "The system is based on cutting-edge technology. It is fast, very precise and reliable," German delegate Hans-Joachim Daerr said. The United States, by contrast, said the warning system should be "an expansion of the existing system in the Pacific," ambassador to Japan Howard Baker said.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Reuters

AUTHOR: Elaine Lies

DATE: 20 January

Tsunami warning system pledged

KOBE -- Officials from around the world pledged Thursday to establish a tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean within 12 to 18 months. The December 26 tsunami that killed more than 212,000 people and left millions homeless made the warning system a top priority for a United Nations-sponsored conference on disaster prevention in Kobe, Japan. "In the matter of a year, at latest 18 months, there should be a basic regional capacity on tsunami early warning," Salvano Briceno, director of the U.N.'s disaster reduction body, told a news conference after a session on the Indian Ocean disaster. He said that available technologies would be used at first and gradually added on to, or upgraded, with time. Educating people to the dangers of a tsunami, and what to do in case one strikes - seen as a crucial part of the tsunami warning process - may take slightly longer. "We have to respond to the dangers of

tsunami as soon as possible so we have to use what we have to hand," Briceno said in the western Japanese city of Kobe that was devastated by a strong earthquake a decade ago. U.N. experts will visit Asian nations, including India and Thailand, over the next week to see what their needs are and what they can offer in terms of technology. A ministerial meeting on the warning system is set for January 28 and 29 in Phuket, Thailand. The system is likely to be modeled on the Hawaii-based Pacific warning system -- set up in 1960 after an earthquake in Chile triggered tidal waves that killed more than 100 people in Japan and other Pacific nations -- with modifications as needed for local conditions. Funding remains incomplete, but Japan has pledged some \$4 million and Sweden \$1.5 million, Briceno said. Numerous proposals have been made for the system by countries attending the conference, and critics say integrating these competing ideas, and coordinating efforts to help, could make it hard to get the system off the ground, which U.N. officials deny. "It's a great thing that (there) is so much vitality and so much happening at the same time," said Jan Egeland, the director of U.N. Emergency Relief. Japan is the site of some 20 percent of the world's earthquakes of magnitude 6 or over, which have also left a history of devastating tsunamis - experience it has put to good use in setting up a tsunami warning system that aims to issue a warning within three minutes. Officials said Tokyo was eager to share its knowledge and skills. "The Japanese government has taken a very positive initiative," Shuzen Tanigawa, Senior Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, told the news conference. Disaster Minister Yoshitaka Murata said this was due to its extensive experience with the killer waves, but some in the media have said it may be an effort to gain extra clout in the region. Some at the Kobe conference fear that other goals, such as reducing deaths from more frequent natural disasters such as floods, typhoons and drought, may be overshadowed by the tsunami and that the conference itself may yield nothing concrete. "There is still time for a positive outcome," said Eva von Oelreich, head of disaster preparedness for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. "But there is a very real danger that all we will get is rhetoric."

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Ria Novosti (Russia)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 20 January

KOBE CONFEREES CONFIRM EARLY CALAMITY WARNING NECESSITY

MOSCOW/KOBE -- A world conference on reducing calamity effects is happening in Kobe, Japan. The attendees confirmed the necessity for an early warning network of calamities in the Indian Ocean, said Yuri Brazhnikov, a Russian delegation head, in charge of the international activities department at the emergency relief ministry. "As the conferees see it, the system is to be based on seismic monitoring and urgent public warning," he told reporters. The conference had a special session Thursday on the recent Indian Ocean calamity. The conferees offered accounts of the dire aftermath of the quake and the tsunami, and measures the affected countries' governments are taking for the population relief. The speakers expressed heartfelt gratitude to the entire world for its timely assistance. Indonesia was stricken the worst. As its delegation head reported, the tsunami took 90,000 lives. About 130,000 are missing, and more than 650,000 are homeless. Twelve out of the twenty affected areas were razed to the ground. Material damages amount to \$1.5 billion, on preliminary estimations, even before an environmental damage evaluation. Aid to the homeless is the nation's worst problem. The injured and the bereaved also need psychological help. Sri Lanka lost 40,000 lives, and 500,000 were left homeless.

Resting on tourism, the national economy suffered tremendous damage. All attendees were called to draw lessons from the tragedy and work to withstand the elements, reported Russia's Emergency Ministry press service. Jan Egeland, United Nations Deputy Secretary General for humanitarian issues, addressed the gathering to point out the world's timely and efficient response to the disaster. More than 85 percent of the sum announced as necessary for relief has been collected as of today, 25 days after the tragedy. The US delegation proposed to establish a natural disaster early warning system in the Indian Ocean as part of the global monitoring system, and will propose the issue for discussion to the 3rd Earth Monitoring Summit in Brussels. The special session was summed up in a statement. It highlights the necessity of establishing an early warning system to proceed from cutting-edge R&D and technologies, including an easily accessible public warning system, and the insurance of public readiness to act in the face of calamities, say Russia's Emergency Ministry PR.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Agence France Press

AUTHOR:

DATE: 21 January

UN meet to avoid specifics on disaster reduction after marathon talks

KOBE -- A global conference in the wake of the Asian tsunamis was set to use general language to encourage countries to reduce disaster risks, declining to set specific requirements. Delegates meeting in Kobe, Japan, negotiated late for a second straight evening to seal a deal before the five-day conference of 150 countries closes Saturday. Salvano Briceno, head of the UN disaster reduction group leading the conference, said the final document would be general with the United Nations (news - web sites) giving itself a year to set more specific guidelines. "Many people, the vast majority, would prefer something stronger, more precise and more detailed. That is one issue on which there was not much difference," Briceno told AFP. "Everyone would have liked to identify specific targets with specific indicators to know how progress advances, we could have said for example that a number of schools or hospitals be made safe in the next 10 years," he said. Briceno blamed the lack of specifics on the difficulties of sorting out views amid a surge of interest in disaster reduction following the tsunamis which have killed some 220,000 people. "We could have done more if we had not had the tsunami, had more time to focus on the framework for action. Now it may be a bit simpler than some would like," Briceno said. Briceno had announced on Thursday a broad agreement to let the United Nations take the lead in building a tsunami warning system for the Indian Ocean amid offers from donor countries to share their technology. But talks continued largely on how specific the language should be in setting standards for countries, diplomats said. "We are concerned that the final document will have wording that will not be meaningful," said Eva Calvo, a spokeswoman for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. One Western diplomat said that most countries hit by the tsunamis had hurriedly sent delegations to Kobe and were concerned about being forced by donor countries to make financial commitments. Briceno said, however, that a major issue was resources: whether to devote funding from development or humanitarian budgets to take account of the need to reduce disaster risks. The United Nations has proposed that all donor countries for the next 10 years devote 10 percent of their aid to measures that prevent or lessen the impact of disasters before they happen. Briceno said the tension was whether the burden should come from humanitarian funds usually spent on emergencies or development

budgets preoccupied with scourges such as poverty and AIDS. The reason for the lengthy discussions "is not so much a matter of countries as systems," he said. Another controversy which has stirred negotiations was climate change. The United States, which has rejected the Kyoto protocol which requires gas emission cuts, had gone on record opposing references to global warming in the final declaration, saying the meet should avoid the controversial issue. Briceno said small island nations which fear global warming had pushed to go stronger on the issue than is likely in the final documents. "It is a real misunderstanding," Briceno said. "This conference is not about climate change," he said. "The issue is that we need to reduce vulnerability to all hazards, whether to human or natural causes." The meeting took on a new role after the tsunamis amid outrage that Indian Ocean nations had no warning when giant waves battered their coasts. Australia, Germany, Japan and the United States have all promoted using their tsunami prediction technology in the Indian Ocean. The United Nations will sort out the differences with the aim of putting a regional system in place in 12 to 18 months.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Financial Times

AUTHOR: David Pilling

DATE: 21 January 2005

UN takes the lead in tsunami warning system

KOBE -- A plan to build a tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean began to take shape yesterday as the United Nations exerted its authority by saying it was the only body that could co-ordinate such a complex multilateral effort. At a conference in Kobe, Japan, on natural disasters, Salvano Briceno, director of the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, said: "We have to engage and integrate the governments of the affected countries. They don't want the US to come and tell them what to do, or Japan or Australia. That's why they are putting pressure on us to co-ordinate things." UN experts said they could have a basic system working in the Indian Ocean within 18 months. This could be extended to the Caribbean, Mediterranean and still-vulnerable Pacific islands a year later. Unesco's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, which helps run the Pacific tsunami early warning system from Hawaii, and the World Meteorological Organisation would lead the technical process, officials said, as well as determining what additional infrastructure would be required. Other agencies and donor countries would contribute, including training staff in vulnerable countries on how to interpret and relay tsunami warnings. Although donors, including Germany, Japan and China, were still jostling for attention yesterday, most representatives said the UN had a vital role to play. Mr Briceno said an Indian Ocean system would cost Dollars 8m-Dollars 12m (Pounds 4.2m-Pounds 6.3m) in the first two years, though more would be needed to extend and maintain the system. Japan has pledged Dollars 4m, Sweden Dollars 1.5m, the European Union Euros 2m (Dollars 2.6m, Pounds 1.4m), and the UK, Germany and others had offered unspecified financial assistance. A blueprint had existed for a global tsunami warning system for a decade, Mr Briceno said, but had never been implemented because of the perceived low risk. * International donors pledged to give Indonesia Dollars 1.7bn this year to help fund the reconstruction of its tsunami-stricken Aceh province, reports Shawn Donnan in Jakarta. The pledges, at the close of a two-day conference, depend on Jakarta's drafting of a plan to rebuild Aceh, which it expects to cost more than Dollars 4.5bn over five years. The World Bank said the pledges were part of more than Dollars 5bn in aid promised to countries affected by the December 26 disaster. But yesterday's

offers, in addition to Dollars 3.4bn pledged to help fund Indonesia's budget and other programmes, came amid a big improvement in ties between Jakarta and its donors. Previous meetings of the Consultative Group on Indonesia have often served as a conduit for donor frustration with the slow pace of reform under previous governments. Apart from the tsunamis, donors yesterday cited an acceleration of reforms under President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a former general who took office in October promising to tackle corruption and boost growth, as reasons for the improvement in ties.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: The Guardian
AUTHOR: Justin McCurry
DATE: 21 January

Tsunami warning system for Indian Ocean next year

KOBE -- A tsunami warning system will be in place in the Indian Ocean by the middle of next year at the latest, UN officials said yesterday. "In the matter of a year, at latest 18 months, there should be a basic regional capacity on tsunami early warning," Salvano Briceno, director of the UN disaster reduction agency UNISDR, said at the World Disaster Reduction conference in Kobe. The UN will be responsible for implementing the system, which will cost an initial \$8m (£4.3m). Meanwhile, Japan and other countries will pass on data about potential tsunamis to countries in the Indian Ocean region. "Until the system is fully operating, in response to requests from the affected countries we will provide observation data through existing networks," said Shuzen Tanigawa, Japan's senior deputy foreign minister. "Something has to be done now. You can't always wait until there is a consensus." The warning system will draw on technology already used in the Pacific, but upgraded and expanded over time.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Reuters
AUTHOR: Elaine Lies
DATE: 21 January

Huge risks loom for world's megacities

KOBE -- The devastation likely in the world's teeming megacities should natural disaster strike could be far worse even than the huge losses of last month's Asian tsunami in which more than 225,000 died, experts at a United Nations (news - web sites) disaster prevention conference said. Megacities are vulnerable to various dangers including earthquakes, tropical storms and floods, and time to prepare may be running out. "We are talking about extreme events," Srikantha Herath, an expert in urban risk management at the U.N. University in Tokyo, told Reuters in Kobe, where the conference is being held. "It's a question of whether we can prepare in time. Sometimes urbanisation goes so fast you can't intervene." Others were even more blunt. "Megacities are becoming the highest vulnerability of all," said Salvano Briceno, head of the U.N.'s disaster reduction body. Megacities are defined as those with a population of 10 million or more and a dense concentration of people, often in slums formed when people stream in from poor rural areas in search of work. "People are a different source of vulnerability," said Janos Bogardi, at the Institute for Environment and Human Security in Bonn. "They settle in slums in some of the most

risk-prone areas." According to U.N. data, the five largest megacities are the greater Tokyo area with 35.3 million people, Mexico City with 19 million, New York-Newark 18.5 million, Bombay 18.3 million and Sao Paulo 18.3 million. Frequently growth occurs so rapidly that authorities are overwhelmed. Istanbul, which is highly vulnerable to earthquakes, grew from 1 million people in the 1950s to about 10 million today, a 10-fold increase in half a century. OVERWHELMING GROWTH - Waves of migrants crowd into existing houses, often substandard, or put up cheap shelters wherever they can, frequently on land left empty because it is dangerous. In Quito, the capital of Ecuador, many flimsy houses perch on the side of hills where they are vulnerable to landslides caused by earthquakes or volcanic eruptions. For Bombay the risk is tropical storms, for San Paulo it is floods and for Mexico it is earthquakes. While megacities in developing nations may suffer most when disaster strikes, some of the world's most modern urban areas are also at risk, both from dramatic events such as earthquakes and far more frequent ones like floods. "Some of these big disasters are not occurring in exotic, faraway places but also in Europe," said Bogardi. "We cheat ourselves if we believe we are in safety." New York is vulnerable to severe weather and experts say it could be hit by an earthquake. The whole east coast of North America could one day be devastated by a tsunami caused by an undersea landslip off the Canary Islands, some scientists say. Japan is vulnerable to cyclones but the big danger is earthquakes. A quake in Kobe a decade ago killed 6,433 people and caused economic losses of nearly \$100 billion. The greater Tokyo area is a particular concern because of its high population, history of earthquakes and the impact on the world economy if a major quake devastated the capital of the world's number two economy. Experts say a major quake in the city, which was flattened in 1923 by a quake and subsequent fires, is long overdue. In a recent report, German reinsurer Munich Re gave it the highest "at risk" rating for natural disasters of 30 megacities, saying that a major earthquake would result in hundreds of thousands of fatalities. Preparedness lags in many areas. Even in earthquake-aware Japan, the Kobe area long believed it was not at great risk, setting it up for greater damage and loss of life when the 1995 earthquake struck. "Perhaps the most frightening prospect would be to have a truly megadisaster in a megacity," Jan Egeland, head of U.N. Emergency Relief, told Reuters this week. "Then we could have not only a tsunami-style casualty rate as we have seen late last year, but we could see 100 times that in a worst case."

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Reuters

AUTHOR: Elaine Lies

DATE: 21 January

Bickering threatens tsunami warning system

KOBE -- Differences have emerged at a U.N.-sponsored conference over plans for a tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean region, threatening efforts to put it into place quickly. More than 225,000 people died in the massive December 26 tsunami in the region, thousands of whom might have been saved if an early warning system was in place. Numerous proposals have emerged for the system at the conference on disaster prevention in the Japanese city of Kobe, prompting some delegates to say they feared different nations were jockeying for leadership of the high-profile project. "To me, the most important thing is that whenever help is needed, international society provides it, not using these national platforms," said Taito Vainio from Finland's Ministry of the Interior on Friday. "I understand that it's important to have your national flag on things, but it should be far down." During a

special session on the tsunami on Thursday, Germany, France, Japan and the United States were only a few of the nations lining up to make proposals, while India highlighted a system of its own. U.S. ambassador to Japan, Howard Baker, suggested extending the current Hawaii-based Pacific warning system that was set up after a 1960 earthquake in Chile triggered a tidal wave that killed more than 100 in Japan and other Pacific nations, while Japan pledged the highest level of support. POLITICS VS GENEROSITY - "When it comes to tsunami, we believe that Japan is the most advanced in terms of knowledge and technology," Shuzen Tanigawa, senior vice foreign minister. To some delegates this showed politics could trump generosity, but others acknowledged that Japan, with its long history of earthquakes and devastating tsunamis, certainly had a crucial role to play. "I think that a competition is sadly possible, as it was in which country donated most," said Walter Ammann, director of the Department of Natural Hazards in Davos, Switzerland. "That is probably too negative, though. At least something is moving." U.N. officials, who promised on Thursday to have the system up and running in 12 to 18 months, have denied there is any rivalry and say the world organisation intends to keep on coordinating the process over the next weeks and months as the details are worked out. But many delegates, already worried that an early warning system has overshadowed long-term but less dramatic goals of making disaster reduction a key part of aid to developing nations, said they feared disagreements over the warning system symbolised the differences at the conference as a whole. Many are also concerned that the final statement, due out when the conference ends on Saturday, will contain no concrete goals or timelines for either disaster reduction or the warning system. One proposal in the draft statement was to hold another conference on the early warning issue next year. "What we fear is that we'll end up with this conference being a talking shop, with a recommendation to have another talking shop," said John Sparrow of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: BBC

AUTHOR: Jonathan Head

DATE: 22 January

Scarred Kobe sends tsunami reminder

KOBE -- Although the focus of discussion at the recent United Nations conference in Japan was the staggering death toll of the Asian tsunami, the gathering had actually been planned to coincide with the 10th anniversary of another disaster... the Kobe earthquake. As they arrived in their rooms, many of the delegates attending the UN conference were surprised to find a written message from the hotel management. "Dear guests," it read, "please do not be alarmed if the building creaks. This is normal, due to high winds this season." It certainly did creak disconcertingly through the night, only, we were told, because the high-rise hotel had a flexible structure, to help resist earth tremors. The reassurance was perhaps necessary because this was, after all, Kobe, the Japanese city which has become a byword for unforeseen disaster. Living in one of the most geologically unstable countries on the planet, the Japanese have always prided themselves on their readiness to face earthquakes, typhoons, floods, landslides and volcanoes. Japan has them all. They rehearse incessantly for such events. They also pride themselves on the engineering prowess they have acquired while trying to tame their volatile terrain. They make world-class products that do not break, world-class infrastructure that never fails, and they have a world-beating addiction to concrete, with which they have smothered their rivers and

mountainsides to stop them moving around so much. So it came as a shock on the morning of 17 January 1995 to hear that parts of the country's second largest port, Kobe, had collapsed. People watched in disbelief at pictures of elevated motorways toppled on their sides and fires raging uncontrollably in residential neighbourhoods. More than 6,000 people lost their lives and 300,000 their homes... in an area the experts had said was low-risk. Patchy development - Today the city centre is rebuilt, its gleaming towers clustered along Osaka bay, backed dramatically by mountains. It was this magnificent location that sealed the city's fate. At 0546, a relatively minor geological fault ruptured close to the earth's surface, just offshore. Boxed in by the mountains, the tremors rippled along the coast in the soft and easily-moved soil under Kobe. The shocks lasted just 20 seconds, but at more than seven on the Richter scale, they were powerful enough to crumble the foundations of older buildings, and bring down the giant cranes on the harbour. I took a walk around the district of Nagata, west of the city centre. This area of old houses, many wooden, was almost entirely consumed by fire after the quake. Ten years later, many homes have been rebuilt but often only with cheap, pre-fabricated materials, and there are large gaps where no rebuilding has taken place. Even with all Japan's wealth, recovery has been hard for the people of this poorer neighbourhood. Crippling chaos - At the Symphony bakery, I spoke to Yoshiko Inaoka. She and her husband have run bakeries in Kobe for 20 years. She recalls a strange sensation just before the quake. "My heart was pounding as I lay in bed," she said, "then the house started rocking from side to side like a ship at sea." She remembers people running out of their broken homes in their nightclothes when it was still dark. "Neighbours tried to help and comfort each other," she said, "but there were many still trapped inside." No-one came to rescue them. With roads and communications crippled, the city government was powerless. At 0800, just over two hours after the quake, shouts of "fire" could be heard. The flames spread quickly, burning those who could not get out, to death, in front of their distraught families. Firefighters from other towns rushed to Kobe to help, but got stuck in huge traffic jams. When they arrived, they found their hoses did not fit the Kobe hydrants. The fire in Nagata burned for two days. Long road ahead - The UN chose to hold its disaster reduction conference here to concentrate minds on the lessons learned from Kobe: that with all the technology and experience Japan has, it was still taken by surprise. Then the Asian Tsunami occurred... and concentrated minds even more. As it happens, Japan also has a state-of-the-art tsunami warning system which the conference was happy to adopt as the basis for something similar in the Indian Ocean. But the much thornier issues they discussed were how to keep people informed and educated to minimise casualties, and how to help devastated regions like Aceh and the Sri Lankan east coast recover. In her cake shop, tears welled up in Yoshiko Inaoka's eyes, as she talked about hearing news of the tsunami. "I really feel for those people," she said, "not just for what they've been through, but what they still have to go through." She and her husband borrowed heavily to rebuild their bakeries. They are still overwhelmed by debt. People moved out of Nagata. Their children's school lost 40% of its pupils. "I was so grateful just to survive," she said. "I didn't worry about losing our home and business. But I had no idea how hard the past 10 years would be.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: BBC

AUTHOR:

DATE: 22 January

Disaster talks agree action plan

A UN conference has adopted an action plan to reduce casualties and damage caused by natural disaster, following the recent Indian Ocean tsunami. Delegates from around the world in the Japanese city of Kobe agreed on the need to build early warning systems and make disaster preparation a priority. But the five-day forum failed to set specific targets or deadlines from implementing the plan. Last month's tsunami killed more than 160,000 people. 'Framework for Action' - After marathon talks, delegates agreed on the text of a declaration that was then approved at the end of the conference on Saturday. "It is vital to give high priority to disaster risk reduction in national policy, consistent with [governments'] capacities and resources available," the declaration said. "We believe it is critically important that the Hyogo Framework for Action be translated into concrete action at all levels," the document - named after Hyogo Prefecture - said. The forum also agreed to put the UN in charges of building a tsunami alert system for the Indian Ocean to be operational in up to 18 months. The plan urges nations to share satellite-based weather forecasting data, draw up hazard maps and work out disaster-response strategies over the next 10 years. However, UN relief chief Jan Egeland acknowledged that the adopted documents were largely symbolic. "The decisions of this conference are not legally binding documents but carry a strong moral commitment by states and organisations," Mr Egeland said. 'Slow process' - The action plan also fell short of setting specific targets or funding deadlines. UN representative Salvano Briceno said differences in opinion and a general tone of the plan were inevitable with so many delegates attending. "When there are so many differences, so many views among countries, it is a slow process," Mr Briceno told the AFP news agency. "It has to be and the outcome has to be a very general document," he added. The meeting in Kobe was initially planned to coincide with the 10th anniversary of the earthquake that ravaged the city. But it took on a new dimension after the 26 December tsunami that affected more than 10 countries.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Reuters

AUTHOR: Elaine Lies

DATE: 22 January

Disaster Meeting Agrees on Tsunami Alert System

KOBE -- Experts and officials from around the world agreed to try to cut the number of deaths in disasters over the next decade and promised to set up a tsunami warning system at a conference that ended on Saturday. But aid workers said the framework agreement, which the United Nations (news - web sites) hopes will halve the number of people killed in natural disasters, lacked detail on the steps needed to achieve its aims. The death of more than 225,000 people in last month's Indian Ocean tsunami had made an early warning system a top priority at the five-day U.N.-sponsored conference on disaster reduction in the Japanese city of Kobe. "All disaster-prone people deserve to have early warning systems," Jan Egeland, the U.N.'s director of Emergency Relief, told a news conference. The huge Dec. 26 earthquake and tsunami it spawned had made everyone in the world aware of the need for aid to reduce disaster risk. "The tsunami was the wake-up call for all of us," he said. U.N. officials have promised to have a warning system up and running in the Indian Ocean within 12 to 18 months, and Salvano Briceno, head of the U.N.'s disaster reduction body, said about \$8 million had been pledged for the system. About \$4 million of that is from Japan, whose long history of earthquakes and devastating tsunamis has prompted it to set up a system that aims to issue a warning within three minutes, expertise it has pledged to use in the new system. The main

purpose of the meeting was convincing wealthy donor countries to invest small amounts of aid in the hope of reducing death and destruction when disaster strikes in developing nations. The conference in Kobe, where 6,433 people were killed in an earthquake a decade ago, adopted a framework agreement to be implemented over the next 10 years. Among steps outlined in the agreement are cooperating to develop risk maps, the use of satellite technology to help with early warning and developing programs to teach people in hazardous areas what to do when a warning is issued, something experts at the meeting said was especially needed. HALVING DEATHS - Egeland reiterated his hope of halving the number of deaths from natural disasters over the next decade. About 600,000 people were victims of natural disasters over the last 10 years, but that was down by a third from the previous decade. "I think it is achievable," Egeland said. "We are counting thousands of new deaths a day due to the tsunami. Those lives, for the better part, would have been saved if we had the early warning system." Officials had worked late into the night to hammer out details of the statements, a process some delegates said was hampered by disagreement over measures to hold governments to promises and whether to require nations to pay a fixed amount to reduce the danger of disasters before they happen. Aid workers welcomed the agreement on the early warning system but said the framework agreement lacked concrete details of how its ambitious goals were to be achieved. "You have to ask whether this conference and its outcomes have honored those who died in the Asian earthquake and tsunamis," Eva von Oelreich of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said in a statement. "Have they brought hope to the survivors and to other vulnerable people that soon the day will come when the chance of such horror occurring again will have been reduced to the minimum?" Differences even appeared to have emerged over the tsunami warning system. Numerous proposals have emerged about the best system to adopt, and some delegates fear countries are jockeying for leadership of the high-profile project. U.N. officials have denied rivalry and say their organization will coordinate the process as details are worked out. For more news on emergency relief from Reuters Alert Net visit <http://www.alertnet.org> email

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Reuters

AUTHOR: Elaine Lies

DATE: 22 January

Disaster conference to end with little in hand

KOBE -- Promises of a tsunami early warning system were likely to be the sole achievement of a conference ending in Japan on Saturday, leaving as distant as ever a goal of finding ways to reduce the number of lives taken by natural disasters. The deaths of more than 225,000 people in last month's Indian Ocean tsunami had made setting up an early warning system for the region an urgent priority for a five-day U.N.-sponsored conference on disaster reduction. The conference was held the western city of Kobe, hit by a devastating earthquake a decade ago that killed 6,433 people. No one at the conference disagreed with the need for the warning system, which officials pledged to have in place within 12 to 18 months. However, some delegates said they feared the issue had diverted attention from the main conference topic of convincing wealthy donor nations to invest smaller sums before disasters occur to reduce the toll they take in lives and money. Jan Egeland, director of U.N. Emergency relief, said at the start of the conference that 10 percent of all emergency relief funds should be spent for disaster relief reduction. Delegates said that could prove easier said than done. "Reduction of vulnerability is a long-term thing," said

Daniel Kull, an adviser to Prevention Consortium, a Geneva-based NGO. "It's not as sexy a topic, and hard to sell. "That's where we'd wish there'd be a bit more focus." Officials worked late into the night on Friday to hammer out details of a statement to be issued at the end of the conference. But a conference spokesman said it was not set to include any numerical goals or ways of keeping governments accountable for their promises, making it largely toothless. A draft copy said it was essential to spend early to reduce the toll from disasters. "Without considering disaster risks in development aid, societies are more vulnerable to catastrophe," it said. Toothless statement - "We are extremely concerned," John Sparrow, an East Asian official for the International Society of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, told Reuters late on Friday. "Some of the terminology in key passages would appear to be so vague it's difficult to see what it means other than being rhetoric." Differences even appeared to have emerged over the tsunami early warning system, putting its early realisation at risk. Numerous proposals have emerged and some delegates fear nations are jockeying for leadership of the high-profile project. The United States and Japan lined up to lay out their proposals, along with Germany and France. India highlighted a system of its own. To some delegates, this suggests political motives may be threatening to trump generosity. Others said Japan, with its long history of earthquakes and devastating tsunamis, certainly had a crucial role to play. U.N. officials have denied any rivalry exists and say their organisation will continue to coordinate the process over the ensuing weeks and months as details are worked out. Some voice worries that too much emphasis is being placed on technology and not enough on the community training and education seen as even more essential to ensure residents of endangered areas know what to do when a warning is issued. "We can't just cover our conscience by installing an expensive early warning system and think that the problem is solved," said Walter Ammann, director of the Department of Natural Hazards in Davos, Switzerland.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Swiss Info

AUTHOR:

DATE: 22 January

Swiss urge action following disaster summit

An international conference in Kobe, Japan, has adopted an action plan to reduce deaths and damage caused by natural disasters following the Asian tsunami. Swiss delegates were generally positive about the outcome, but said words had to be translated into deeds as soon as possible. Experts and officials at the United Nations-sponsored conference, which ended on Saturday, agreed on the need to make disaster preparation a priority. They also made it a target to develop a tsunami early-warning system to be up and running in the Indian Ocean within 12 to 18 months. It follows the deaths of more than 200,000 people in last month's tsunami. The text of the framework agreement was adopted after five days of talks. The measures it outlines are due to be implemented over the next ten years. "All disaster-prone people deserve to have early warning systems," Jan Egelund, the UN director of Emergence Relief told a news conference. Cooperation and education - Measures outlined include cooperation on drawing up risk maps, the use of satellite technology to help with early warning, and programmes to educate people in hazardous areas about what to do when a warning is issued. The UN hopes the agreement will halve the number of people killed in natural disasters. Swiss delegates, who served on the drafting committee, were also pleased with the final document. "We are very positive about the outcome," Meinrad Studer, a senior advisor with the Swiss Agency for

Development and Cooperation, told swissinfo. "Under Switzerland's chairmanship the conference was able to draw up a concrete framework agreement." "We managed to reach a consensus to strengthen disaster prevention measures. But the talks were difficult at times, with respect to who bears responsibility," Studer added. Criticism - Although they welcomed agreement on the early-warning system, aid workers criticised the lack of specific targets or deadlines in the action plan "You have to ask whether this conference and its outcomes have honoured those who died in the Asian earthquake and tsunamis," said Eva von Oelreich of the Geneva-based International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in a statement. "Have they brought hope to the survivors and to other vulnerable people that soon the day will come when the chance of such horror occurring again will have been reduced to the minimum?" Studer said he believed NGOs were disappointed because they had expected more from the conference. "But the countries taking part had different expectations: they were looking for a framework document setting out clear priorities." Egelund conceded that the decision of the conference were "not legally binding", but said they carried a "strong moral commitment by states and organisations".

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Financial Times

AUTHOR: David Pilling

DATE: 28 January 2005

COMMENT & ANALYSIS: Prevention is better than cure but the world is still unprepared for disaster: Fear of calamity in a changing climate AFTER THE TSUNAMIS: Improvements to protect lives need not mean big spending but often require more capable governments and greater international co-ordination, writes David Pilling:

TOKYO -- When RazzakAli, a wireless operator, saw thesea churn and suck back towards the horizon as he worked up a tower on the island of Teressa in the southern Andamans, he put what he calls his "personal early warning" system into action. Shouting "a tsunami is coming", Mr Ali told a man on a passing moped to warn everyone in neighbouring villages to flee. Thanks to his foresight, the result of watching a television programme about tidal waves, at least 1,500 people were saved. No one could have prevented the massive earthquake off the coast of Sumatra or the subsequent tsunamis that killed an estimated 280,000 people around the Indian Ocean. But as Mr Ali demonstrated, lives could be spared through timely intervention - in his case purchased for the price of a second-hand scooter and a subscription to satellite television. Across the Indian Ocean as a whole, where an early warning system could have been installed for Dollars 8m-Dollars 12m (Pounds 4m-Pounds 6m), tens of thousands of deaths could have been avoided. "We can't stop the disasters," says Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, Bangladesh's minister for food and disaster management. "But definitely we can reduce the risk of people who are vulnerable to disaster." The extent of the world's neglect of counter-disaster measures is becoming clear. Like the Indian Ocean, the Caribbean and Mediterranean seas are bereft of a tsunami early warning system. Experts say even the much-heralded system in the Pacific, which has operated since the 1960s and gathers information from sea-bed sensors, has many blind spots. "Japan, Russia, Canada, the US, Australia and New Zealand. That's it," says Salvano Briceno, director of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, the United Nations secretariat responsible for co-ordinating disaster prevention. "When you go to the small (Pacific) islands, if a tsunami hits them now, it would be as devastating as it

was for the Maldives." The lack of readiness goes far beyond tsunamis. Each year fairly predictable typhoons, cyclones, hurricanes, floods and droughts cause enormous and often preventable damage. In 2002 alone, according to the World Food Programme, 600m people were caught up in natural disasters. Belgium's university-based Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters estimates that weather and ocean-related disasters killed 620,000 people in the decade to 2001, causing Dollars 700bn of damage. Yet a paltry 2 per cent of the Dollars 4bn-Dollars 5bn spent on disasters by the UN and international charities goes on prevention, according to GTZ, the German agency for technical co-operation. The ISDR is just four years old, has no permanent budget and a tiny staff of 14 who do not know if they will have a job from month to month. Mr Briceno says disaster relief has been more of a priority, although various UN agencies had their own prevention programmes. Now he expects his secretariat will be put on a stable footing and given an annual budget that he hopes will start at about Dollars 250m. Jan Egeland, UN head of humanitarian affairs, says the world has had a "wake-up call" about the institutional neglect of disaster reduction. "Before the tsunami, this was a special interest group issue," he says. "Now it is an issue for heads of state." Mr Egeland says studies show that for every Dollars 1 spent on disaster reduction about Dollars 10 is saved by limiting the need for subsequent relief. A 1998 paper written by Kiyoshi Kobayashi of Kyoto university's civil engineering department is one of many to conclude that flood control measures, for example, have benefits of 10 times the expected damage levels if no insurance is available. "Much more attention has to be given to disaster prevention and preparedness," Mr Egeland says. "We need to be more than a fire brigade." At a global conference on disaster reduction in Kobe last week - only the second to be held - the case for prevention began to take shape. "Risk is when the probability of disaster and vulnerability collide," says Marcus Oxley, disaster management director for Tearfund, a UK-based charity, who attended the conference. "You can't do much about probability, but you can do a lot about vulnerability through improving infrastructure, making sure your hospitals and schools are safe havens, not death traps, and shoring up your human systems." The same disaster can have vastly different outcomes depending on a country's readiness. In Somalia at least 298 people were killed by the tsunami: in neighbouring Kenya, where the tsunami's progress had been noted and warnings issued, only one person died. As with warnings, so with buildings. On December 26, 2003, an earthquake that hit the Iranian city of Bam destroyed 80 per cent of the buildings, many of them built of mud bricks, and killed 26,000 people. Four days earlier an earthquake of the same magnitude had shaken San Robles, a Californian city with strict building codes. Only two people died. Even rich countries can be caught short. When an earthquake struck Kobe in 1995 the central hospital collapsed as did one of two buildings designated as an earthquake response centre. Gas supplies were not switched off and hundreds of people who had survived the earthquake died in fires. investment in infrastructure, early-warning systems and evacuation procedures can therefore reap huge dividends. The Kobe earthquake notwithstanding, Japan has taken great strides to improve its disaster-readiness. Measures to control floods and landslides have dramatically cut the number of deaths from the typhoons that lash the archipelago each year. Japan has built the world's best tsunami-warning system, capable of issuing accurate alerts minutes after an earth tremor. During the Kobe conference a 5.0 magnitude earthquake shook the coast off Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost island. Within minutes television and radio broadcasts were telling inhabitants that, this time, there was no danger of a tsunami. Even without enormous resources, big improvements are possible. In Bangladesh, a total of 500,000 people died as a result of cyclones in 1970 and 1991. Now, Mr Briceno says: "Early warning systems operate every year on floods, when the monsoons and the rains come . . . Bangladesh has gone from half a million killed in floods to only a few thousand." When countries are financially or institutionally incapable of preparing for disasters,

longer-term development falls by the wayside. If vital buildings, such as schools, hospitals and those housing emergency services are not built to withstand natural shocks, countries are continually having to clear up the wreckage and start from scratch. "Disasters can wipe out years of development in hours," says Klaus Topfer, executive director of the UN Environment Programme. He says disasters pose a huge threat to the UN's millennium development goals, which aim to halve global poverty by 2015. Environmental degradation also plays a role in how severe the effects of some natural phenomena can be, removing natural barriers to hurricanes and storm surges such as tree cover and coral reefs. Last year a hurricane killed nearly 3,000 people in Haiti, where the loss of mangrove protection and a lack of civil organisation left the population exposed. In the Dominican Republic, which shares an island with Haiti, the same hurricane resulted in just a handful of fatalities. Uncontrolled urbanisation has also exposed millions to risk: many of the huge cities in Asia and Latin America, built on fault lines or on coastal areas at risk of flooding, have hopelessly deficient building regulations and emergency services. If the lessons of humanity's inadequate preparations for natural disaster are obvious, the solutions are not. Just as with health or development goals, says Maryvonne Plessis-Fraissard, director of Transport and Urban Development at the World Bank, only states with proper governance can hope to put adequate measures in place. Countries that cannot get clean drinking water to their citizens are unlikely to be able to implement well-planned evacuation procedures or enforce building codes, she says. Some measures, such as early warning systems, can only be co-ordinated at international level. The Kobe conference adopted a global action plan for a substantial reduction in disaster-related deaths over the next decade. It pressed governments to prioritise disaster reduction, ensuring that all vital buildings were built to latest construction codes and that at-risk countries had well-rehearsed evacuation plans and proper information for citizens. But charities including the Red Cross criticised the resolution for failing to set numerical targets and for being non-binding on member states. Mr Egeland has called on the international donor community to devote 10 per cent of the Dollars 4bn-Dollars 5bn that goes to disaster relief each year to disaster reduction, a policy already endorsed by the UK and Germany. Yet there is no foolproof way to earmark highly fungible resources or guarantee that spending more on one thing will not simply mean diverting funds from equally pressing projects. "The danger is that this will descend into turf war," says Mr Oxley of Tearfund, who accuses UN agencies of spending too much time scrapping for budgets and too little co-ordinating their activities. "You need to specify what you are going to deliver and by when. Otherwise these things simply fall through the cracks." Even the relatively simple and specific task of developing a tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean shows the difficulty of mounting a rational response. Countries including the US, Germany, Japan, France, China and Australia have jostled for a leading role in the process. Junichiro Koizumi, Japan's prime minister, took the initiative by giving over two days of the Kobe conference to drawing up a plan. But India and China also announced they would be holding conferences. There will also be several meetings in Europe. "You need to assign (donors) specific areas of work or specific countries," Mr Briceno says. "Early warning systems are a very complex process," he says, referring to the need to knit national systems together into a seamless whole. "It is not just the technical and scientific capacity, which the Inter-governmental Oceanographic Commission of Unesco is co-ordinating, but the capacity-building for each nation." Ms Plessis-Fraissard points out that, unlike for earthquakes which are measured on the Richter scale, many natural disasters do not even have a common international vocabulary. Once tsunami warnings are issued, some means of relaying the message to at-risk communities needs to be devised, whether it be via radio, sirens or personal beepers distributed to a portion of the population. People also need to know what to do and where to go. In Tokyo, for example, every residence and office is assigned a nearby evacuation centre.

Optimists see signs in recent days that donor nations have put aside their suspicions of UN bureaucracy in the interests of getting an Indian Ocean system up and running. The UN is talking about the process as a template for how international co-operation could be organised across the whole area of disaster prevention. Yet when the next natural disaster strikes it is far from certain that the world will be any more prepared than the millions of Asians who thought tsunamis had little relevance to them. Four hurricanes smashed their way last year through the Caribbean and into Florida, where the US insurance industry estimated the damage at Dollars 22bn. Such disasters appear to be on the rise. According to the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, the number of severe weather and ocean-related disasters has risen six- to eightfold since the mid-1970s to nearly 400 a year. The World Meteorological Organisation, part of Unesco and the body that helps run the Pacific tsunami warning system, has concluded there is a clear link between climate change and the rising number of natural disasters. For some, though, the hurricanes of 2004 were simply a natural event - another manifestation of the power of the elements - and even US government scientists were divided. Experts at the US National Center for Atmospheric Research see them as providing some of the clearest evidence yet of anthropogenic (man-made) climate change. But the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, which runs the US National Hurricane Center, attributed the windstorms to a natural swing in the Caribbean's weather cycle. They said: "Since 1995, there has been an increase in the frequency and intensity of hurricanes in the Atlantic Basin. But nothing has been observed that would suggest anything is going on other than a continuation of the decades-long cycle of more and less activity that has been occurring for the last few hundred years." Relatively few big hurricanes were observed from the 1970s to early 1990s, they pointed out, compared with considerable activity between the 1940s to early 1960s. That is the problem with climate change: at present, we cannot say for sure whether it is taking place. But if events such as the 2004 hurricanes were one of the first manifestations, climate change will have consequences that are likely to be very serious. Even if those events were just freak weather, the weight of world scientific opinion suggests that climate change will happen, as a consequence of what human beings are doing to the planet. In his interview with the FT this week, Tony Blair, the prime minister, said the "overwhelming probability is that it is a problem" and committed his presidency of the Group of Eight leading industrial nations to a widening dialogue on the issue. Climate change scientists argue that we are playing with the earth's weather systems by pumping greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide and methane, trap infra-red radiation instead of allowing it to be dissipated into space. This effect has been known to scientists since the 19th century. Burning fossil fuels releases vast quantities of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Scientists estimate that we have raised the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere from about 280 parts per million in pre-industrial times to levels approaching 380 parts per million. They point to an alarming consequence of this increase in atmospheric carbon. The global temperature has been rising. Of the hottest 15 years on record, every one has occurred since 1980, and the hottest five since 1997, according to the UK's Natural Environment Research Council. Sceptics say that the world is heating up naturally as it emerges from a "mini ice age", which dominated the past few centuries. In the history of the planet, there have been many times when atmospheric carbon has reached higher levels without any human action. At some stages in history, the ice caps have almost disappeared. Who is right will have an enormous impact. Some businesses have taken the sceptical line and rejected calls for curbs on carbon emissions - in the US, for instance, the National Association of Manufacturers stands firm against such restrictions. But others have adopted a more cautious approach. Already, the insurance industry - likely to be one of the sectors most affected by any worsening in the weather - is gearing up to deal with the possible consequences. By

some estimates, climate change will cost the world Dollars 150bn a year in 10 years' time, which translates into Dollars 40bn a year in insurance costs alone. Lord Oxburgh, chairman of Shell, in a Greenpeace lecture this week urged more regulation to encourage the adoption of low-carbon technologies, saying it was not "going to happen if the market is left to itself".

END ITEM

NORTH AMERICAN MEDIA

MEDIUM: Associated Press
AUTHOR: CHARLES J. HANLEY
DATE: 17 January

U.N. Summit Looks at Disaster Prevention

KOBE -- The world's nations, generous with their aid since the Asian tsunami catastrophe, must take action to be prepared for and prevent such natural events from becoming mass killers, the U.N. emergency relief chief said Monday. "After the tsunami, I believe everybody expects concrete results coming out of Kobe," Jan Egeland said on the eve of a five-day World Conference on Disaster Reduction here. The gathering is expected to attract 3,000 government officials, non-governmental experts and other specialists from around the world to discuss ways to reverse the growth in numbers of people affected by natural disasters. The Dec. 26 earthquake and tsunami, which claimed at least 162,000 lives in 11 nations, has focused new attention on the long-planned U.N. conference, where delegates are expected to work on plans for a tsunami warning system for the Indian Ocean similar to one on guard for killer waves in the Pacific. The meeting coincides with the 10th anniversary of the earthquake that devastated this Japanese port city of 1.5 million, killing almost 6,500 people and showing the Japanese and the world the vulnerability of their metropolises to natural disasters. The mournful people of Kobe marked the date - Jan. 17, 1995 - with a candlelight vigil and other ceremonies. But arriving conference delegates found a city on the rebound, with new shopping centers and office buildings, and many new homes in neighborhoods leveled by fire 10 years ago. "I think the whole world can learn from Kobe," Egeland said as he took part in a symposium, "Living with Risk," one day before Tuesday's conference opening. By one measure - the impact on populations - natural disasters are on the rise, U.N. officials report. They say more than 2.5 billion people were affected by earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and other such events between 1994 and 2003, a 60 percent increase over the numbers of the previous two 10-year periods. More than 478,000 people were killed in such disasters in 1994-2003. Dozens of conference sessions will take up such subjects as "building safer communities against disaster" and educating the public on flood risks. Exhibitors, meanwhile, will show their disaster wares, from backpack-sized floodlights to new seismic intensity meters and "tsunami refuge towers." Led by Australia, Germany and Japan, the world's nations have pledged more than \$5 billion to help survivors of last month's tsunami, particularly in Indonesia and Sri Lanka. Symposium participants praised the generous reaction, but Egeland, a U.N. undersecretary-general, also said he has "become more and more convinced that much more attention has to be given to disaster prevention and preparedness. We need to be more than a fire brigade." The conference agenda is heavy with discussions of hazard assessment, public awareness campaigns and international cooperation, such as in building stronger systems to detect tsunamis, a relatively rare occurrence of massive waves triggered by undersea earthquakes, and to alert coastal populations to the danger. Michael Jarraud, secretary general of the World Meteorological Organization, noted at the symposium that last summer's string of Caribbean hurricanes caused relatively few casualties in the United States and Cuba, which have well-rehearsed evacuation plans, while they killed almost 3,000 people in impoverished Haiti, "telling us the importance of preventive measures." In a keynote speech, Bangladesh's minister for food and disaster management,

Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, said it is vital to improve people's economic situation, so they can build better homes in areas not so vulnerable as his nation's Bay of Bengal islands, regularly devastated by cyclones. "We can't stop the disasters, but definitely we can reduce the risk of people who are vulnerable to disaster," he said.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press

AUTHOR:

DATE: 17 January

U.N. disaster conference to focus on creation of tsunami-warning system

KOBE -- A U.N. conference this week will discuss coping with earthquakes, cyclones, typhoons and hurricanes, but one particular disaster will dominate: last month's tsunami. The meeting starting Tuesday in the port city of Kobe - itself the victim of a killer earthquake a decade ago - will focus on the proposed creation of a tsunami warning system for southern Asia similar to one that protects nations bordering the Pacific Ocean. The Dec. 26 tsunami disaster, triggered by a powerful earthquake off the coast of Indonesia's Sumatra island, killed more than 160,000 people and ravaged vast stretches of coastline from Thailand to Somalia. Experts say a warning system could have saved countless lives. "I have become more and more convinced that much more attention has to be given to disaster prevention and preparedness," Jan Egeland, U.N. undersecretary general for humanitarian affairs, said Monday. "We should be more than a fire brigade." The expected 3,000 delegates and experts from around the world gathering in Kobe will have plenty of tsunami-related proposals to consider this week. The head of the U.N. scientific agency already has announced that the organization will lead efforts to set up a provisional tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean within 18 months, at a cost of more than \$30 million. French officials, meanwhile, say Paris is likely to propose building a base for the system on Reunion, a small French island in the Indian Ocean. Bangladesh - which was largely unscathed by the Dec. 26 disaster - plans to raise anti-tsunami coordination at an Asian regional summit next month. The United States, while pledging to help substantially with the Asian effort, also is planning an expanded system closer to home. Last week, Washington unveiled a \$37.5 million plan for a network to protect both the Pacific and Atlantic coasts by mid-2007. In the meantime, Japan and the United States - the countries with the most advanced existing systems - could provide tsunami warnings to countries around the Indian Ocean until their own system is in place, a Japanese official said last week. In addition to the basic plan to set up a warning system, delegates were expected to pay special attention to the logistics of distributing information quickly to coastline communities, many of them with limited communications networks and little access to information. U.N. officials were hoping for significant progress ahead of the conference. "We need to have very strong early-warning systems. We need to develop a culture of international cooperation," said Salvano Briceno, director of the International Strategy on Disaster Reduction. "This is the most important tribute the international community could pay to the victims of the recent tsunami disaster." Tuesday's meeting is the second U.N. World Conference on Disaster Reduction, following a gathering in Yokohama in 1994. Part of the work of this year's conference will be to assess progress in the past decade. Tsunami will not be the only topic conference delegates tackle this week. The agenda also includes health concerns following disasters, the resistance of infrastructure to earthquakes and hurricanes, identifying and assessing risk, and education. The conference comes just as the host city, Kobe, marked the 10th anniversary of a 7.3-magnitude quake that struck Jan. 17, 1995.

The disaster killed 6,433 people, injured 43,792, and caused \$96 billion in damage. The high death toll was blamed in part on a confused and delayed response by the central government. While disaster response from Tokyo has been greatly strengthened since then, concerns remain that many of Japan's local communities still are not prepared for another tragedy. That is considered a high liability in one of the world's most earthquake-prone nations. The government has estimated that a major quake under the capital of Tokyo could kill more than 12,000 people and destroy 850,000 homes.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: CNW (Canada)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 17 January

Canadian Leadership at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction

TORONTO -- The Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction (ICLR) is honoured to announce that Gordon McBean will be a featured presenter this week at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan. Dr. McBean will speak on January 21st on a panel that will discuss actions to reduce disaster damage in urban centres. Professor McBean said, "The Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction and the World Meteorological Organization have been working for a long time to ensure that the Conference would include an expert discussion about the growth in disaster damage in urban centres around the world and the urgent need for action to confront this alarming trend. I am excited that this important issue will be front and centre at this important international event" The presentation by Dr. McBean will address 'Climate Change and Increasing Risks in Urban Areas'. He said that "I will stress the importance of investing in disaster loss prevention to mitigate the alarming increase in severe weather losses experienced in major cities around the world. Our research shows that society must invest actively in disaster safety if we are to halt and reverse the worrisome trend of rising damage, particularly in urban centres." Dr. McBean is the ICLR Chair, Policy, and an internationally recognized expert on climate policy and extreme weather. He is also a Professor at The University of Western Ontario and he was recently appointed Chair of the International Council of Science Union's Planning Committee for the Natural Hazards Research Program. Paul Kovacs, Executive Director, ICLR said, "this is the largest and most important international meeting on disaster loss prevention in a decade. I am excited that ICLR's leadership in disaster loss prevention research will make a significant contribution to the conference. Our safety research holds significant potential to reduce disaster damage in Canada and around the world. Often the greatest tragedy is that most disaster loss can be prevented through preparedness and investments in loss prevention." Established in 1998 by Canada's property and casualty insurers, ICLR is an independent, not-for-profit research institute based in Toronto and The University of Western Ontario in London, Canada. ICLR is a centre of excellence for disaster loss prevention research and education. ICLR's research staff is internationally recognized for pioneering work in a number of fields including wind and seismic engineering, atmospheric sciences, water resources engineering and economics. Multi-disciplined research is a foundation for ICLR's work to build communities more resilient to disasters. Ongoing ICLR funding is provided by the insurance community, The University of Western Ontario and the Ontario Research and Development Challenge Fund.

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MEDIUM: Associated Press
AUTHOR: Charles J. Hanley
DATE: 18 January

U.N. Tsunami Conference Opens in Japan

KOBE -- A global conference on the tsunami catastrophe opened Tuesday amid calls for direct world action to prevent such natural events from becoming mass killers. The gathering drew some 3,000 government officials, non-governmental experts and other specialists from around the world to find ways to reverse the growth in numbers of people affected by natural disasters. "After the tsunami, I believe everybody expects concrete results coming out of Kobe," top U.N. emergency relief official Jan Egeland said before the start of the five-day World Conference on Disaster Reduction. The Dec. 26 earthquake and tsunami, which claimed at least 162,000 lives in 11 nations, has focused new attention on the long-planned U.N. conference, where delegates are expected to work on plans for a tsunami warning system for the Indian Ocean similar to one on guard for killer waves in the Pacific. The meeting coincides with the 10th anniversary of the earthquake that devastated this Japanese port city of 1.5 million, killing almost 6,500 people and showing the Japanese and the world the vulnerability of their metropolises to natural disasters. The mournful people of Kobe marked the date - Jan. 17, 1995 - with a candlelight vigil and other ceremonies. But arriving conference delegates found a city on the rebound, with new shopping centers and office buildings, and many new homes in neighborhoods leveled by fire 10 years ago. "I think the whole world can learn from Kobe," Egeland said as he took part in a symposium, "Living with Risk," on Monday. By one measure - the impact on populations - natural disasters are on the rise, U.N. officials report. They say more than 2.5 billion people were affected by earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and other such events between 1994 and 2003, a 60 percent increase over the numbers of the previous two 10-year periods. More than 478,000 people were killed in such disasters in 1994-2003. Dozens of conference sessions will take up such subjects as "building safer communities against disaster" and educating the public on flood risks. Exhibitors, meanwhile, will show their disaster wares, from backpack-sized floodlights to new seismic intensity meters and "tsunami refuge towers." Led by Australia, Germany and Japan, the world's nations have pledged more than \$5 billion to help survivors of last month's tsunami, particularly in Indonesia and Sri Lanka. Symposium participants praised the generous reaction, but Egeland, a U.N. undersecretary-general, also said he has "become more and more convinced that much more attention has to be given to disaster prevention and preparedness. We need to be more than a fire brigade." The conference agenda is heavy with discussions of hazard assessment, public awareness campaigns and international cooperation, such as in building stronger systems to detect tsunamis, a relatively rare occurrence of massive waves triggered by undersea earthquakes, and to alert coastal populations to the danger. Michael Jarraud, secretary general of the World Meteorological Organization, noted at the symposium that last summer's string of Caribbean hurricanes caused relatively few casualties in the United States and Cuba, which have well-rehearsed evacuation plans, while they killed almost 3,000 people in impoverished Haiti, "telling us the importance of preventive measures." In a keynote speech, Bangladesh's minister for food and disaster management, Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, said it is vital to improve people's economic situation, so they can build better homes in areas not so vulnerable as his nation's Bay of Bengal islands, regularly devastated by cyclones. "We can't stop the disasters, but definitely we can reduce the risk of people who are vulnerable to disaster," he said.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press

AUTHOR:

DATE: 18 January

Disaster conference opens in Japan

KOBE -- A U.N. conference on natural disasters in Japan is expected to focus on the creation of a tsunami warning system for countries around the Indian Ocean that were devastated by last month's earthquake-induced disaster. The gathering that started Tuesday has brought some 3,000 government officials, non-governmental experts and other specialists from around the world to Kobe to discuss ways to reverse the growth in numbers of people affected by natural disasters. The December 26 earthquake and tsunami, which claimed at least 162,000 lives in 11 nations, has focused new attention on the long-planned U.N. conference, where delegates are expected to work on plans for a tsunami warning system for the Indian Ocean similar to one on guard for killer waves in the Pacific. "After the tsunami, I believe everybody expects concrete results coming out of Kobe," Jan Egeland said on the eve of a five-day World Conference on Disaster Reduction. Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, who has backed such a system and pledged Japanese technical expertise in building one, was set to address the forum later Tuesday. Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko were among the dignitaries attending the opening ceremony in the port city of Kobe -- the site of a magnitude 7.3 earthquake 10 years ago that killed almost 6,500 people and showed the Japanese and the world the vulnerability of their metropolises to natural disasters.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press

AUTHOR: Joseph Coleman

DATE: 18 January 2005

U.N. conference opens, struggles with complex task of preventing tsunami disasters

KOBE --The system worked perfectly. From sensors far offshore, Japanese meteorologists in March 2002 detected a tsunami headed toward the southern island of Ishigaki and quickly warned residents of the possible danger. But instead of heading for the hills, islanders went to the beach to watch. The story was told by a Japanese tsunami expert at the opening of a U.N. conference on disaster reduction, illustrating the complexities of the meeting's most urgent task: laying the groundwork for a warning system that would have saved countless lives in southern Asia's tsunami catastrophe. The tsunami was expected to dominate the five-day World Conference on Disaster Reduction in the port city of Kobe, with conferees and experts tussling over questions of relief aid, the threat of disease and reconstruction in the vast zone of destruction in southern Asia. The conference opened with a moment of silence for the some 170,000 people killed in 11 countries in the Dec. 26 tragedy. U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in a videotaped greeting, urged participants to make countries "more resilient" to natural disasters. "The tsunami was an unprecedented, global natural disaster," Annan said. "I think we are already seeing an unprecedented, global response." In a series of meetings and workshops over coming days, experts were to discuss protection of vital facilities like schools, hospitals and seawalls, construction of quake-proof buildings, the strengthening of communications networks and limiting environmental damage, among other topics.

At the top of the agenda, however, was setting the stage for a tsunami early-warning network for the Indian Ocean similar to the one that now protects the Pacific. The U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has proposed a system that would cost US\$30 million ([euro]23 million) and go into operation by mid-2006. "What we need to have here is a strong commitment by countries and agencies," said Jan Egeland, U.N. undersecretary general for humanitarian affairs, adding he hoped such systems could be extended to all disaster-prone regions in the next 10 years. Egeland and others, however, acknowledge that a warning system alone is not enough. Among the needs are well-placed breakwaters, quake-proof seawalls of sufficient height, detailed hazard maps showing danger areas and well-defined evacuation routes and shelters. Fumihiko Imamura, a tsunami expert from Tohoku University, showed a videotape of islanders on Ishigaki who gathered along the coast to witness the tsunami when they should have evacuated. While no one was injured, he said the case showed the limitations of warning systems. "No matter the amount of information, the residents have to understand the importance of evacuation," he told a symposium on tsunami. Another top concern is the communication of warnings from government agencies to residents on the ground. Many of the areas hit by the Dec. 26 tsunami suffered from deep poverty and lack of basic education and communications networks. Residents should be educated about warning signs of impending tsunami - such as offshore earthquakes and suddenly receding sea-levels - so they will know to evacuate on their own, said Laura Kong, director of UNESCO's International Tsunami Information Centre in Honolulu, Hawaii. "Many governments are talking about early warning systems. What is most important is to have an aware population, so that every citizen along a coastline knows what a tsunami is, knows the warning signs," she said. The case of Japan is instructive of the challenges faced. Despite the earthquake-prone country's long experience with tsunami and its highly advanced early warning system, Japan still lacks many of the elements that are essential to an effective defense. Only 10 percent of local governments in Japan have hazard maps, for instance. Nearly a third of seawalls along vulnerable coasts have not been tested for proper height, and 66 percent of them have not been checked for resilience against earthquakes. Experts say they are alarmed about the lack of preparation in a country where some offshore areas face an estimated 90 percent chance of a powerful earthquake over the next 30 years. It was still unclear what shape the proposed regional tsunami-warning system would take. France was expected to suggest basing it on Reunion, a small French island in the Indian Ocean. An Asian regional summit next month was also expected to take up the topic. In the meantime, Japan and the United States, the countries with the most advanced existing systems, could provide tsunami warnings to countries around the Indian Ocean until their own system is in place, a Japanese official said last week.

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MEDIUM: Associated Press

AUTHOR: Charles J. Hanley

DATE: 18 January 2005

'Draw on every lesson,' Annan advises disaster conference delegates

KOBE -- In the wake of an ocean wave that horrified an unready world, hundreds of U.N. conference delegates Tuesday got down to the business of finding ways to give man more of an edge in an age-old battle with the worst of nature. "We must draw and act on every lesson we can," U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan told participants in the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which opened with a moment of silence for the more than 160,000 people killed in the Dec. 26

earthquake-tsunami that ravaged coasts across south Asia. "The world looks to this conference to help make communities and nations more resilient in the face of natural disasters," Annan said in his videotaped message. The first day's agenda for the five-day meeting focused on routes to resilience: by protecting such critical facilities as hospitals and power plants against damage; building earthquake-safe structures, and bolstering communications systems, among others. The Japanese government announced it would refocus its foreign aid program to put more emphasis on disaster reduction. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, addressing the conference, also said his government would offer tsunami-warning training to countries struck by the powerful, earthquake-spawned wave that sped across the Indian Ocean last month. "It will be possible to save many lives in future Indian Ocean tsunamis if early warning mechanisms are rapidly developed," he said. An immediate conference goal is to lay the foundation for an Indian Ocean alert network like the one on guard for tsunamis in the Pacific. The U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is presenting a blueprint for a system of deep-water buoys, tide gauges and a regional alert center that would cost US\$30 million ([euro]23 million) and go into operation by mid-2006. Several sessions here will deal with the practicalities of the plan. "Rarely has a tragedy made a conference so topical and timely as this one," Annan said. His U.N. emergency coordinator, Jan Egeland, told reporters he hopes governments and U.N. agencies will make a "strong commitment" here to establish the Indian Ocean system. He also said he believed that over the next 10 years - the period covered by this conference's "framework of action" - all vulnerable populations will be covered by advance warning systems. It was "heartbreaking," he said, to see almost 3,000 people killed in Haiti by a hurricane last summer, when better-prepared countries, such as Cuba and the United States, suffered relatively few casualties. He told the conference, however, that "technology is not a cure-all." Beyond the "hardware," Egeland said, children should be educated to the risks of disasters; hospitals, clinics and schools should be viewed as safe havens and built to withstand quakes, cyclones and other disasters; and all disaster-prone countries should adopt "action plans" to deal with the threats. The conference convened in Kobe 10 years after much of this Japanese port city was devastated in a great earthquake that killed 6,400 people. Japanese officials this week repeatedly cited this country's experience with natural disasters as an example for other nations. "The most important factor in disaster reduction is to learn lessons from past disasters and to take measures in response," Japan's Emperor Akihito said at the opening session. His government's minister for disaster management, Yoshitaka Murata, noted that tropical storms were once major killers here. "In the devastated and vulnerable land after World War II, every major typhoon cost us thousands of lives," he said. "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." The conference has drawn some 4,000 delegates and other participants from 150 countries. Through the week, in dozens of sessions, they will discuss such subjects as health care in the aftermath of disaster; financial risk and disaster insurance; and mitigating the impact of quakes, floods and other events on the cultural heritage of societies.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: United Press International

AUTHOR:

DATE: 18 January

Conference focuses on disaster readiness

KOBE -- An international conference on natural disasters opened in Japan Tuesday with calls for the world to heed the lessons of last month's Indian Ocean tsunami. The five-day World Conference on Disaster Reduction, meeting in the city of Kobe, was timed to coincide with the 10th anniversary of the earthquake that killed more than 6,400 Kobe residents and ravaged the city. But discussion of the Dec. 26 tsunami, which killed at least 158,000 people in 11 countries, was expected to dominate the U.N.-organized meeting, the BBC reported. U.N. humanitarian affairs chief Jan Egeland called for better protection for poor, vulnerable communities. Setting up a tsunami warning system for the Indian Ocean, similar to the one that exists in the Pacific, is high on the agenda of the conference, which has approximately 3,000 participants. However, another theme mentioned was the necessity of community-level readiness to deal with disasters. U.N. officials said that children need to be taught safety drills, and that hospitals, schools and health centers need to be robust enough to withstand earthquakes and floods.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Voice of America

AUTHOR: Steve Herman

DATE: 18 January

UN Convenes Disaster Conference in Japan

KOBE -- Three weeks after an earthquake and tsunami devastated communities across the Indian Ocean, hundreds of experts and government officials are meeting in Japan to find ways to reduce the toll from such disasters. They are gathering in the city of Kobe, which itself was battered by a powerful earthquake 10 years ago this week. The conference setting is a world away from the devastation on everyone's mind in Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Thailand and elsewhere in southern Asia. The United Nations is leading the world's biggest relief effort in the Indian Ocean to help the millions displaced by the earthquake and tsunami that hit on December 26. In a posh ballroom at a first class hotel, Japan's Emperor Akihito on Tuesday welcomed more than 4,000 delegates from around the world. The emperor says he hopes Japan's experience and disaster reduction technology will, in some way, be able to contribute to reducing damage caused by calamities around the world. Kobe itself is testament to how a city devastated by disaster can rebuild. One-fourth of the buildings here were destroyed or damaged when a massive earthquake hit 10 years ago, but almost all have been rebuilt. In a videotaped message Tuesday, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan told the delegates Tuesday that money must be spent now to prepare all nations for natural disasters and to reduce their deadly toll. One priority at the conference is the effort to develop tsunami warning systems to cover the world. Japan has such a system and there is a U.S.-operated warning center that covers much of the Pacific Ocean, but there was no warning system in the Indian Ocean. Many experts say seismic monitors and special marine buoys would have detected the massive waves that swept across the region last month, and given governments time to warn people to flee to higher ground. In addition to technical sessions on a variety of subjects - such as restoring the health of victims after disasters - delegates are to adopt a declaration pledging to reduce damage caused by disasters worldwide. Japan on Tuesday announced a new initiative for disaster reduction using its foreign aid. Although no monetary figure has been revealed, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi says his nation will "spare no effort" to contribute human resources and share information, as well as providing recovery support with technology and money.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press

AUTHOR:

DATE: 18 January

U.N. emergency chief: World needs more than a 'fire brigade' of generous nations

KOBE -- A global conference on the tsunami catastrophe opened Tuesday amid calls for direct world action to prevent such natural events from becoming mass killers. The gathering drew some 3,000 government officials, non-governmental experts and other specialists from around the world to find ways to reverse the growth in numbers of people affected by natural disasters. "We must draw and act on every lesson we can," U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan told participants in the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which opened with a moment of silence for more than 160,000 people killed in the Dec. 26 earthquake-tsunami that ravaged coasts across southern Asia. "The world looks to this conference to help make communities and nations more resilient in the face of natural disasters," Annan said in his videotaped message. The earthquake and tsunami has focused new attention on the long-planned U.N. conference, where delegates are expected to work on plans for a tsunami warning system for the Indian Ocean similar to one on guard for killer waves in the Pacific. "The best way we can honor the dead is to protect the living," U.N. emergency relief chief Jan Egeland said at the start of the five-day World Conference on Disaster Reduction. "We must meet today to take on this challenge with renewed urgency and vigor, knowing that we must translate words into deeds and good intentions into concrete actions." Japan's Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko were among the dignitaries attending the opening ceremony in the port city of Kobe - the site of a magnitude 7.3 earthquake 10 years ago that killed almost 6,500 people and showed the world the vulnerability of metropolises to natural disasters. The mournful people of Kobe marked the date - Jan. 17, 1995 - with a candlelight vigil and other ceremonies. But arriving conference delegates found a city on the rebound, with new shopping centers and office buildings, and many new homes in neighborhoods leveled by fire 10 years ago. By one measure - the impact on populations - natural disasters are on the rise, U.N. officials report. They say more than 2.5 billion people were affected by earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and other such events between 1994 and 2003, a 60 percent increase over the numbers of the previous two 10-year periods. More than 478,000 people were killed in such disasters in 1994-2003. Dozens of conference sessions will take up such subjects as "building safer communities against disaster" and educating the public on flood risks. Exhibitors, meanwhile, will show their disaster wares, from backpack-sized floodlights to new seismic intensity meters and "tsunami refuge towers." Led by Australia, Germany and Japan, the world's nations have pledged more than \$5 billion to help survivors of last month's tsunami, particularly in Indonesia and Sri Lanka. Symposium participants praised the generous reaction, but Egeland, a U.N. undersecretary-general, said before the conference that he has "become more and more convinced that much more attention has to be given to disaster prevention and preparedness. We need to be more than a fire brigade." The conference agenda is heavy with discussions of hazard assessment, public awareness campaigns and international cooperation, such as in building stronger systems to detect tsunamis, a relatively rare occurrence of massive waves triggered by undersea earthquakes, and to alert coastal populations to the danger. Michael Jarraud, secretary general of the World Meteorological Organization, noted at the symposium that last summer's string of Caribbean hurricanes caused relatively few casualties in the United States and Cuba, which have well-rehearsed evacuation plans, while they killed almost 3,000 people in impoverished Haiti, "telling us the importance of preventive measures." In

a keynote speech, Bangladesh's minister for food and disaster management, Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, said it is vital to improve people's economic situation, so they can build better homes in areas not so vulnerable as his nation's Bay of Bengal islands, regularly devastated by cyclones. "We can't stop the disasters, but definitely we can reduce the risk of people who are vulnerable to disaster," he said.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Voice of America

AUTHOR: Steve Herman

DATE: 19 January 2005

UN Body Plans Worldwide Tsunami Warning By Steve Herman

KOBE -- Meteorological experts discuss tsunami disaster mitigation in Indian Ocean during UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan. An international conference in Japan is focusing on improving systems to warn of tsunamis and other ocean-related hazards. United Nations organizations say they intend to have an initial tsunami early warning system in place for the Indian Ocean in a year, and to expand it worldwide in 2007. Officials of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, or UNESCO, made an appeal Wednesday for a united effort to build the system, whose cost in its Indian Ocean phase is estimated at between \$13-\$30 million. The plea for coordination, made at an international disaster-reduction conference here in Kobe, comes amid various and possibly conflicting systems proposed by a number of countries, including the Japan, the United States, Germany, India and Australia. The plans have been generated in wake of last month's earthquake in Sumatra and the resulting massive tsunami that hit 12 countries and brought death, injury or destruction to millions of people. The executive secretary of UNESCO's intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, Patricio Bernal, says with everyone working together, a proposal for funding can be made to donor nations in July. "You are seeing the reaction of scientific communities, governments, national groups. Our challenge, and we took this very early on, we feel that we need to provide the common platform to bring the coordination of all these efforts," he said. The experts say it is important to put something concrete in place during the next few months. The head of ocean services for the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, Peter Pissierssens, says he is worried that the spotlight could shift to another world event in the meantime. He also worries about the problem of finding continuing funding for a worldwide network, when dangerous tsunamis are such an infrequent event. "It's really difficult to defend with decision makers to sustain a system for decades or even longer than that, for an event like a tsunami, that may happen once in 40 years in terms of a large tsunami, or once in a 100 years. And so the idea would be to make it a more integrated early warning system involving other ocean related hazards and disasters," said Mr. Pissierssens. Officials here also warn that any system must have the support of states in countries that face danger from tsunamis. They point out, as in the case of the December 26 disaster, if there is no infrastructure in place to disseminate warnings to local officials and the public, the millions of dollars spent to create a worldwide system will have little value.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: United Press International

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January 2005

U.N. offers disaster early warning plan

KOBE -- United Nations, United States, Jan. 19 (UPI) -- The United Nations is laying plans for a global early warning system to reduce death tolls from such natural hazards as the Indian ocean tsunamis. The plan was put forward Wednesday in Kobe, Japan, at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, a conclave called before the Dec. 26 tsunamis struck. It combines speedy transmission of data along with training of populations prone to such natural disasters as droughts, wildfires, landslides, hurricanes, typhoons, cyclones, floods, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and tsunamis. "This new program will help bring safety, security and peace of mind," said the director of the U.N. International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, Salvano Briceno. "Millions of people worldwide owe their lives and livelihoods to effective early warnings systems." The International Early Warning Program on disasters was first proposed at the Second International Conference on Early Warning two years ago in Bonn, Germany, but gained prominence with the tsunami catastrophe. The U.N. plan comes in the face of several early warning proposals from entities and nations, including the United States.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press Dow Jones

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January 2005

Experts At Japan Conference Assess Tsunami Warning System

KOBE -- Meteorological experts were examining a Pacific Ocean tsunami warning system on Wednesday as they tried to lay the groundwork for a similar alert network in southern Asia. Participants at a U.N. conference on natural disasters were also discussing ways to coordinate efforts to protect vulnerable regions. The Dec. 26 tsunami, triggered by a massive earthquake off the coast of Indonesia, killed more than 160,000 people in Asia and Africa, and experts say many of those lives could have been saved if a warning system had been in place. The U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has proposed a system in the Indian Ocean - including offshore detection buoys and a communications center - that would cost \$30 million. The conference opened in Kobe, Japan, on Tuesday, with a moment of silence for the tsunami victims, and U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan urged participants in a videotaped greeting to make countries "more resilient" to natural disasters. In a series of meetings and workshops, experts will discuss protection of vital facilities like schools, hospitals and seawalls, construction of quake-proof buildings, the strengthening of communications networks and limiting environmental damage, among other topics. Experts, however, acknowledge that a warning system alone is not enough. Among the needs are well-placed breakwaters, quake-proof seawalls of sufficient height, detailed hazard maps showing danger areas and well-defined evacuation routes and shelters. Another top concern is the communication of warnings from government agencies to residents on the ground. Many of the areas hit by the Dec. 26 tsunami suffered from deep poverty and lack of basic education and communications networks. The case of Japan is instructive of the challenges faced. Despite the earthquake-prone country's long experience with tsunami and its highly advanced early warning system, it still lacks many of the elements that are essential to an effective defense. Only 10% of local governments in Japan have hazard maps, for instance. Nearly a third of seawalls along vulnerable coasts have not been tested for proper height, and 66% of them have not been checked for

resilience against earthquakes. Experts say they are alarmed about the lack of preparation in a country where some offshore areas face an estimated 90% chance of a powerful earthquake over the next 30 years. It was still unclear what shape the proposed regional tsunami-warning system would take. France was expected to suggest basing it on Reunion, a small French island in the Indian Ocean. An Asian regional summit next month was also expected to take up the topic. In the meantime, Japan and the U.S., the countries with the most advanced existing systems, could provide tsunami warnings to countries around the Indian Ocean until their own system is in place, a Japanese official said last week.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press

AUTHOR: Joseph Coleman

DATE: 19 January 2005

U.N. calls for unified, global tsunami system amid proliferation of differing proposals

KOBE -- India plans a tsunami-warning system that its neighbors could join, while Indonesia envisions one run by southeast Asian countries. The Germans are pitching their own high-tech network, but the United Nations says it should set up the system _ and then extend it globally. The Asian tsunami disaster demonstrated with terrifying power the need for an alert system in the Indian Ocean and other parts of the world, but the outpouring of support to build one has generated a plethora of overlapping proposals. Amid the confusion, U.N. officials at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan, called on Wednesday for coordination of efforts _ and insisted on their own central role in marshaling the expertise and setting up the system. "The event was of such magnitude that we have seen forthcoming some very interesting and very complete proposals," said Patricio Bernal, executive secretary of the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, which coordinates a warning system in the Pacific. But, he said, "we feel we need to provide the common platform." The conference, which was refocused to concentrate on tsunami after the Dec. 26 Asian tragedy killed more than 160,000 people, has set its top priority as the construction of an early warning system for ravaged nations in the Indian Ocean. The model for the new network is an existing system in the Pacific, which was established in 1965 and now provides early tsunami warnings to 26 nations. Experts say much of the technology _ from earthquake and sea level sensors to messaging systems _ could be easily transferred to southern Asia. The key, experts said, is organizing Indian Ocean nations so that they are able to transmit alerts to coastal communities and share information among themselves quickly. Scientists will face the complex tasks of gauging tsunami risks along varied coastlines and other assessments of hazard. Countries also need evacuation plans and other measures to mitigate tsunami damage. Still, officials are confident they could put together a functioning system in southern Asia by the middle of next year. The U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which runs the IOC, has already proposed such a network in the Indian Ocean that would cost \$30 million, with the ambitious goal of extending it worldwide by mid-2007. But first, the United Nations will have to sort through the differing ideas about what should be done. UNESCO plans two meetings in Paris, the first in early March, to put all the proposals on the table, find common ground and work toward a single course of action. "I would like to propose that we go about establishing this system in a coordinated way," said UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura. In a three-hour session Wednesday, weather experts, seismologists and oceanographers from around the

world discussed the lessons learned from 40 years of operating the Pacific Ocean system and gave broad outlines of what a network in southern Asia could look like. The ideas were varied. K. Radhakrishnan, director of India's National Center for Ocean Information Services, said his country has the technological capability to build a broad network that would stretch from Australia to eastern Africa by September 2007, for \$30 million. "India has a road map," he declared. Indonesia, meanwhile, wants to expand its quake and tsunami monitoring centers as part of its national protection plan, and suggested a quake information center run by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations could be retooled to focus on tsunami. Even distant Germany has come forth with a warning system for part the region, though Bernal of the IOC said the plan was "ambitious" because it appeared to require technological advances to implement. U.N. officials and other experts said different levels of systems were needed for different types of threats. Coastal areas near the epicenters of tsunami-generating earthquakes, for example, would have very little time to react to the impending danger and would rely on breakwaters, seawalls and resident awareness of the warning signs to avert disaster. Regional systems, however, would come into play when the epicenter was far enough away from the epicenter to mean that a warning _ if transmitted quickly _ would come in time to prompt an effective evacuation. There are also differing plans on what to do outside of Asia. The United States last week unveiled a 37.5 million plan to build a warning system designed to protect both the Pacific and Atlantic coasts by mid-2007. The plan would boost the size of the network in the Pacific, while erecting similar safeguards for the Atlantic, Caribbean and Gulf coasts.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January

United Nations launches program to set up global warning system for tsunami, floods and other natural disasters

KOBE -- The United Nations will create a global early warning system for tsunami, floods, typhoons and other natural disasters, officials said at a conference in Japan on Wednesday. The International Early Warning Program, which has been planned for two years, is aimed at reducing the damage caused by disasters and increasing international cooperation. "This new program will help bring safety, security and peace of mind," said Salvano Briceno, director of the U.N.'s International Strategy of Disaster Reduction. "Millions of people worldwide owe their lives and livelihoods to effective early warnings systems." The announcement comes as U.N. agencies work to set up a regional early warning system for the area ravaged by the southern Asian tsunami disaster. The Dec. 26 catastrophe killed more than 160,000 people, and experts say an early warning system _ such as one that operates in the Pacific Ocean _ would have saved countless lives. The program announced on Wednesday, however, aims to cover the world and detect all kinds of natural disasters, including droughts, wildland fires, landslides and volcanic eruptions.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press

AUTHOR: Kenji Hall

DATE: 19 January 2005

U.N. Humanitarian Chief stresses U.N. to head tsunami early-warning system

KOBE -- The U.N. humanitarian chief said Wednesday that the United Nations should take the lead in creating a tsunami early-warning system in the Indian Ocean, and that the startup costs could be covered with funds from the US\$4 billion (euro3 billion) already pledged by countries around the world. The Dec. 26 tsunami has led nations gathered at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction here to focus on devising an alert system for tsunamis in the Indian Ocean and elsewhere. Such a system already exists in the Pacific. The United Nations, following an action plan it has devised for reducing disasters, should play a central role in narrowing down and coordinating the various proposals that have emerged for the system, said Jan Egeland, U.N. undersecretary general for humanitarian affairs. The plan, called the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, "is now being like an umbrella for all these good forces," Egeland told The Associated Press in an interview. "I am delighted to have all these initiatives because it just shows that we will have resources, we have the will." The U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has proposed a system of deep-water buoys, tidal gauges and a regional alert center that would cost US\$30 million (euro23 million) and go into operation by mid-2006. With all the money that has been pledged for tsunami recovery efforts, "it should not be difficult to find, say, US\$30 million for such a system," Egeland said. Earlier Wednesday at the Kobe conference, meteorologists, seismologists and oceanographers from around the world discussed the lessons learned from 40 years of operating a warning system for the Pacific Ocean, where most of the world's large undersea earthquakes -- and the tsunami they trigger -- occur. Differing views about a similar system for the Indian Ocean have raised concerns that squabbling might slow the implementation of a plan. Among the proposals was India's plan to start its own tsunami-warning network, and its offer to let neighbors join. Indonesia said it wants southeast Asian countries to run the system, while Germany has put forth its own version of a warning system. Egeland said he saw the proposals as "complementary," not competing. But he also noted that extensive coordination would be needed once nations decide on a system, which might not be fully operational until as late as 2008. "The surveillance of earthquakes that would lead to future tsunami is not a problem. We already can do that," he said, adding that the difficult part is alerting coastal residents about the dangers of tsunami. "In India, they reckon the early warnings should be in place by 2006 ... but it may be 2007 and 2008 before you really have the thing up and going" for the rest of Asia and Africa, he said. U.N. officials and other experts said different levels of systems were needed for different types of threats. Coastal areas near the epicenters of tsunami-generating earthquakes, for example, would have very little time to react to the impending danger and would rely on breakwaters, seawalls and resident awareness of the warning signs to avert disaster.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press

AUTHOR: Charles J. Hanley

DATE: 19 January 2005

U.S. seeks to scuttle conference text linking climate change to disasters

KOBE -- The U.S. delegation to a global conference on disasters wants to purge a U.N. action plan of its references to climate change as a potential cause of future natural calamities. The U.S. stand reflects the opposition of U.S. President George W. Bush's administration to treating global warming as a priority problem. "It's well

known that there's controversy" about climate change, Mark Lagon, deputy delegation head, told reporters Wednesday at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction. "It's our desire that this controversy not distract this conference." The chief U.N. official here had a different view. "I hope there will be a global recognition of climate change causing more natural disasters," said Jan Egeland, U.N. undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a U.N.-organized network of scientists, said in its latest major assessment of climate science that the planet is warming and that this is expected to cause more extreme weather events, such as hurricanes and droughts, as the century wears on. A broad scientific consensus attributes much of the warming to the accumulation of "greenhouse gases" in the atmosphere, such as carbon dioxide from fossil fuel-burning. The Kyoto Protocol, which takes effect Feb. 16, mandates cutbacks in such emissions, but the United States, the biggest emitter, has rejected that international pact. In its preamble, the "framework for action" drafted for adoption at the Kobe conference this Saturday says climate change is one factor pointing toward "a future where disasters could increasingly threaten the world's economy, and its population." Other passages call for strengthening research into global warming and for clear identification of "climate-related disaster risks." The U.S. delegation, supported by Australia and Canada, has called for all references to climate change to be deleted from the main document. The move is opposed by the 25-nation European Union _ a strong supporter of the Kyoto Protocol _ and by poorer nations potentially imperiled by the intensified storms, rising ocean waters and other effects of climate change. "We feel there will be more calamities unless there is some action on climate change. The number of natural hazards will increase," said Siddiqur Choudhury, a delegate from Bangladesh, where a half-million or more people were killed by cyclones in 1970 and 1991. With global warming, millions more Bangladeshis could be displaced from low-lying coastal regions when oceans expand and rise as they receive runoff from melting ice. Egeland, the U.N. emergency coordinator overseeing the relief effort for the Indian Ocean earthquake-tsunami, which killed more than 160,000 people last month, said the world has seen "a dramatic increase in hurricanes, storm surges and climate-caused natural disasters." In an Associated Press interview, he noted that he hasn't been involved in the floor debate over document language. But, he said, "there is climate change. That is not really controversial. What is controversial is what causes climate change" _ a reference to dissenters who contend the role of greenhouse gases may be overstated. John Horekens, the U.N. conference coordinator, said he saw room for compromise on the language: Inclusion of a brief reference to climate change in the action plan, and additional references in a less significant annex.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press

AUTHOR: Joseph Coleman

DATE: 19 January 2005

U.N. calls for unified, global tsunami system amid proliferation of differing proposals

KOBE -- India plans a tsunami-warning system that its neighbors could join, while Indonesia envisions one run by southeast Asian countries. The Germans are pitching their own high-tech network, but the United Nations says it should set up the system _ and then extend it globally. The Asian tsunami disaster demonstrated with terrifying power the need for an alert system in the Indian Ocean and other parts of the world, but the outpouring of support to build one has generated a plethora of overlapping

proposals. Amid the confusion, U.N. officials at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan, called on Wednesday for coordination of efforts _ and insisted on their own central role in marshaling the expertise and setting up the system. "The event was of such magnitude that we have seen forthcoming some very interesting and very complete proposals," said Patricio Bernal, executive secretary of the U.N.'s Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, which coordinates a warning system in the Pacific. But, he said, "we feel we need to provide the common platform." The conference, which was refocused to concentrate on tsunami after the Dec. 26 Asian tragedy killed more than 160,000 people, has set its top priority as the construction of an early warning system for ravaged nations in the Indian Ocean. The model for the new network is an existing system in the Pacific, which was established in 1965 and now provides early tsunami warnings to 26 nations. Experts say much of the technology _ from earthquake and sea level sensors to messaging systems _ could be easily transferred to southern Asia. The key, experts said, is organizing Indian Ocean nations so that they are able to transmit alerts to coastal communities and share information among themselves quickly. Scientists will face the complex tasks of gauging tsunami risks along varied coastlines. Countries also need evacuation plans and measures to mitigate damage. Still, officials were confident they could put together a functioning system in southern Asia by the middle of next year. The U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which runs the IOC, has already proposed such a network in the Indian Ocean that would cost \$30 million, with the goal of extending it worldwide by mid-2007. But first, the United Nations will have to sort through the differing ideas about what should be done. UNESCO plans two meetings in Paris, the first in early March, to put look at all the proposals, find common ground and work toward a single system. "I would like to propose that we go about establishing this system in a coordinated way," said UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura. Elsewhere, Japan on Wednesday briefly issued a tsunami warning after a 6.8 magnitude earthquake struck off its eastern coast. Officials said the waves the quake generated were less than a foot high and posed little danger. U.N. officials in New York said a clearer picture was emerging of the destruction in Indonesia's Aceh province. The town of Calang, for example, lost 90 percent of its population _ 6,550 people out of the pre-tsunami population of 7,300, said Kevin Kennedy of the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. In Indonesia, U.S. helicopters were flying 80 aid missions a day, said Capt. Matt Klunder, Naval Air Wing 2 deputy commander. Villagers were no longer mobbing the helicopters as soon as they touched down, he said. "Now there's a little more confidence because they know that on a somewhat regular basis we can get them foodstuffs and water," he said. In the past week, the missions have begun reaching survivors who sheltered in the mountains after the tsunami and only recently returned to the coast, Klunder said. Among that group, the conditions are sometimes desperate, he added. In Kobe on Wednesday, weather experts, seismologists and oceanographers from around the world discussed the lessons learned from 40 years of operating the Pacific Ocean system and gave broad outlines of what a network in southern Asia could look like. The ideas were varied. K. Radhakrishnan, director of India's National Center for Ocean Information Services, said his country has the technological capability to build a broad network that would stretch from Australia to eastern Africa by September 2007, for \$30 million. Indonesia, meanwhile, wants to expand its quake and tsunami monitoring centers as part of its national protection plan and suggested a quake information center run by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations could be retooled to focus on tsunami. Even distant Germany has come forth with a warning system for part the region, though Bernal of the IOC said the plan was "ambitious" because it appeared to require technological advances to implement. U.N. officials and other experts said coastal areas near the epicenters of tsunami-generating earthquakes would need breakwaters and resident awareness to avert disaster. There are also differing plans

on what to do outside of Asia. The United States last week unveiled a \$37.5 million plan to build a system designed to protect both the Pacific and Atlantic coasts by mid-2007. The plan would enlarge the Pacific network and erect similar safeguards for the Atlantic, Caribbean and Gulf coasts.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Christian News Service (Pacific Rim Bureau)

AUTHOR: Patrick Goodenough

DATE: 19 January 2005

Experts Discuss Tsunami Early-Warning System for Indian Ocean

TOKYO -- Japan is offering to take the lead in international efforts to prepare Indian Ocean nations for future tsunamis, based on its experiences as a country affected by one-fifth of the world's earthquakes. As experts and officials from around the world meet in the Japanese city of Kobe to discuss ways of reducing the impacts of natural disasters, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said his government would provide \$4 million towards the building of a tsunami early-warning system for the Indian Ocean. Such a system has been in place for the Pacific Ocean for decades, but none exists for the Indian Ocean, where more than 160,000 people perished in earthquake-generated tidal waves late last month. Experts have estimated that a wave warning system could have saved thousands of lives in Asia. Koizumi said Japan would also set up a global database on relief and reconstruction. "Various lessons the world learned through past disasters and for disaster prevention can be shared internationally." He said Japan would train disaster experts in developing countries, and proposed the establishment of a research and training center in Japan to deal with water hazards and risk management, in conjunction with the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Japan is among the world's most seismically active regions, and the country has had considerable experience dealing with the results. On Wednesday, an earthquake measuring 6.8 on the Richter scale occurred off the country's east coast, prompting a minor tsunami warning for a group of nearby islands. The world conference on disaster reduction, scheduled to mark the 10th anniversary of an earthquake in Kobe that cost more than 6,000 lives, is being dominated by the Asian tsunami disaster. On Wednesday, experts began a session focusing on having a fully-operational early-warning system for the Indian Ocean in place in the next two to three years. The session was organized by the Japanese Meteorological Agency and UNESCO, whose secretary-general recently announced plans to form an Indian Ocean warning system by June 2006, with a worldwide system in place one year after that. UNESCO, which initiated the Pacific system in 1965, estimates that a regional system for the Indian Ocean will cost \$30 million to set up. The system involves deep-water buoys, tidal gauges and a regional alert center. The role of national governments in preparing vulnerable citizens to respond to warnings by evacuating low-lying areas also will be critical. "It is up to the authorities in individual countries to set up the communication networks needed to ensure that information on tsunami, and other natural disasters, reaches threatened populations," UNESCO director-general Koichiro Matsuura told a recent press conference. "They are also responsible for education and awareness-raising programs to inform people about the actions they can take to save lives and limit the damage of such disasters." In the U.S., the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) late last year was awarded a Department of Commerce medal for its work in developing a new type of moored buoy that provides accurate tsunami information. Operating in the Pacific, the "Dart" (deep ocean assessment and reporting of tsunamis) buoy system has been credited not only with providing

wave warnings, but also with helping to reduce false alarms. According to the NOAA, 75 percent of all warnings issued since 1948 were for non-destructive tsunamis. For instance, in November 2003, Dart data showed that a tsunami heading for Hawaii would not cause damage, thus prompting the cancelation of a tsunami warning. As a result, an evacuation in Hawaii was averted, saving the state an estimated \$68 million in lost productivity. (A similar "false alarm" tsunami in 1986 did lead to an evacuation in Honolulu, at a cost of \$40 million.) "Although scientists can't accurately predict when and where earthquakes will occur, NOAA can determine if a tsunami will be generated from them and help people learn how best to protect themselves and their families from harm," the administration said in a release last November.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Wall Street Journal

AUTHOR: Sebastian Moffett

DATE: 20 January 2005

Japan Seeks to Lead Warning Effort

KOBE -- In a bid to show regional leadership, Japan made an unusually aggressive push to guide international efforts to set up a tsunami-warning system for the Indian Ocean. Experts proposed such a system in the aftermath of the Dec. 26 earthquake and ensuing wave that killed more than 160,000 in Indonesia, Sri Lanka and other countries bordering the Indian Ocean -- a figure likely to climb given the tens of thousands of Indonesians still missing. The system would be modeled loosely on one used for the Pacific Ocean, and it could be up and running as early as a year from now, experts said. In the meantime, the operators of that Pacific system, which include the U.S., Japan and Australia, will provide stopgap warning services for those along the Indian Ocean, using telephone and e-mail. Although several countries are offering assistance in setting up the warning system, Japan has been particularly active in seeking a major role. Tokyo sent the emperor and prime minister to make appearances at the United Nations conference on disasters here, where the system is being discussed, and Japan is leading a special session on tsunami warning. Japan has one of the fastest tsunami-warning networks in the world, and it has seized on the issue to demonstrate its ability to contribute internationally commensurate with its economic importance. "Our country is one of the most tsunami-prone in the world," said Noritake Nishide, director of the Japan Meteorological Agency. "The JMA issues alerts about three minutes after an earthquake," he said. Japan's push comes as it tries to secure its claim as Asia's leading power, a position increasingly challenged by fast-rising China. Also yesterday, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said at a Tokyo news conference that Japan will seek permanent membership on the U.N. Security Council. Mr. Koizumi already has made Japan one of the top aid donors for the disaster, and he announced Japan's biggest overseas dispatch of troops since World War II to help relief efforts. To be sure, plenty of other countries are pushing for big roles as well. Indonesia and India both indicated they would like to host the headquarters of a new Indian Ocean system. The European Union wants to make sure Japan, the U.S. and other countries that exchange information in the Pacific tsunami-warning system don't develop the Indian Ocean network by themselves. "We want the U.N. to play an active role in setting up an early-warning system" for the Indian Ocean, said Daniele Smadja, the European Commission's director for multilateral relations and human rights. U.N. humanitarian chief Jan Egeland said his organization should take the lead, the Associated Press reported yesterday. A tsunami warning for the Indian Ocean already is developing on a piecemeal basis. The Pacific Tsunami Warning

Center in Hawaii issued an informational bulletin 15 minutes after the Sumatra quake that caused last month's wave. But the bulletin didn't contain a warning, said Charles McCreery, director of the center: "We only have [warnings] for the Pacific." Since then, the center has been extending the range of organizations to which it sends warnings by gathering contact information of meteorological agencies in Indian Ocean countries. To develop this e-mail network into a full early-warning system, agencies will use currently available seismic and sea-level data to come up with provisional simulations of how certain types of quakes might trigger a tsunami. One of the plans suggested so far, by the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, would cost \$30 million. Millions at risk in megacity 'death traps'

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press

AUTHOR: Kenji Hall

DATE: 20 January 2005

U.N. conference mobilizes financial, political backing for tsunami warning system for Indian Ocean

KOBE -- Nations rallied behind plans for a network to detect tsunamis in the Indian Ocean and warn coastal residents of the danger, and pledged millions of dollars (euro) Thursday for the United Nations to lead the effort to build one. A tsunami alert system for the Indian Ocean has become a priority since the Dec. 26 tsunami - triggered by a powerful earthquake off the coast of Indonesia - killed as many as 220,000 people in Asia and Africa. UNESCO - the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization - has proposed a network of deep-sea buoys in the Indian Ocean and regional communications centers that would cost US\$30 million ([euro]23 million) and go into operation by mid-2006. On the third day of a five-day U.N. conference in Kobe, delegates gave the go-ahead to start examining various proposals. Salvano Briceno, who heads the U.N. action plan for preventing disasters, said several donors had agreed to help pay for startup costs. Though the final tally was expected later Thursday, so far Japan had offered US\$4 million ([euro]3 million), Sweden US\$1.5 million ([euro]1.2 million) and the European Commission [euro]2 million (US\$2.6 million). Germany and Britain also had promised aid. "In a matter of a year to 18 months, there should be a basic regional capacity on tsunami early warning system," Briceno, director of the U.N. International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, told a news conference. "There are enough resources to start working." How the system will work - and whether it can mesh nations' different networks and technologies - remains unclear. U.S. Ambassador to Japan Howard Baker Jr. said Thursday that Washington supports expanding a warning system for the Pacific Ocean that was established in 1965. That system - which uses ocean sensors and satellite communication links to monitor the potentially killer waves in the quake-prone Pacific - now sends tsunami alerts to 26 nations. Germany has offered to provide a high-tech system that relies on ocean-floor pressure gauges and buoys connected to a satellite-based Global Positioning System. Experts say the technology could be easily transferred to southern Asia. However, the lack of communication with coastal residents remains an obstacle in poor countries, they say. "Early warning systems will only succeed if the people most at risk who are central to the design of a system are able to receive and act upon the warnings," said Ian Wilderspin, an official representing the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Eventually, U.S. officials say the Pacific system could also extend to the Mediterranean, Caribbean and other parts of the globe. But Briceno stressed that the United Nations, not the United States, would lead the effort. He

said that while the United States and Japan would be asked to lend their expertise on tsunami prediction, U.N. officials want to tailor the Indian Ocean system to the needs of poor Asian and African countries. "By putting (the network) under the guidance of the U.N., it ensures all countries participate on equal terms," Briceno said. U.N. agencies will ask Germany, Australia and China for technical assistance, he said. Some countries, such as India and Thailand, may go ahead with plans to protect their own shores, letting U.N. agencies to worry about unifying the system later, Briceno said. Despite the widespread backing for the project, critics said this week's conference risks losing sight of a bigger goal: getting nations to commit to specific targets for reducing the number of people affected by cyclones, droughts, typhoons, floods and other natural disasters worldwide. "There is a very real danger that all we will get is rhetoric," said Eva von Oelreich, who heads the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' disaster preparedness and response unit. Von Oelreich called for targets through 2015. The discussions came as Indonesia's Health Ministry announced Wednesday that more than 70,000 people previously listed as missing are dead, raising its estimate for the tsunami death toll. If confirmed, the overall tsunami death toll in 11 countries would climb to over 221,100, including 166,320 dead in Indonesia. With international relief efforts stretching into a third week, officials praised the initial quick response and stressed the need to follow through on funding. U.N. humanitarian chief Jan Egeland called the effort "the most effective emergency response ever in a major natural disaster."

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Voice of America

AUTHOR: Steve Herman

DATE: 20 January

World's Smallest Nations Seek Voice at Disaster Conference

KOBE -- While global attention is focused on the death toll from last month's earthquake and tsunami that swept across the Indian Ocean, some of the world's smallest states hope the disaster will cast light on the unique challenges they face. Despite the vast size of the December 26 earthquake and tsunami, the nations that were devastated will survive. But the prognosis would not be as hopeful for some of the world's smallest states if they are hit by such a disaster. For the low-lying nation of Kiribati, composed of three Pacific island groups covering 811 square kilometers, the tsunami was a reminder its vulnerability. Teboranga Tiot, of the Office of the President, is the country's sole representative at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction. She is struggling to make her country's voice heard among the more powerful nations at the conference this week in Kobe, Japan. "One day Kiribati will be submerging with a population of nine thousand," she said. "I hope we are significant, as well, in terms of recognition of our problem." Kiribati is downright spacious compared to its neighbor to the southwest, Tuvalu, whose islands cover a mere 21 square kilometers. The deputy secretary to the country's prime minister, Simeiti Lopati, says he thinks the tsunami will bring awareness to the plight of micro-nations, such as his. "Our islands they are not more than three meters high above sea water. And even the land area is so, so tiny," he said. "Hurricanes and tsunami can destroy the whole nation." There are several dozen tiny island nations and territories with populations often as low as 10,000 people. Many of them are little more than clusters of sandy strips of land that rise only a few meters above the sea. Their governments have worried for years that global warming could raise sea levels, completely swamping the islands, and their cultures. While these states individually have scant political clout they do have a high-level official at the United Nations

representing their interests collectively. Anwarul Chowdhury is the U.N. official representing the world's poorest nations. He says natural disasters have a disproportionately high economic, social and environmental effect on small island states. He notes small islands can suffer significant damage to their coral reefs during earthquakes, tsunamis or other natural disasters. "Coral reef attracts tourists, coral reef helps handicrafts, coral reef preserve fisheries and ocean life," added Mr. Chowdhury. "These are very important and these are a sort of economic support to many of the small islands." Island nations in the Pacific and elsewhere are lobbying larger countries to include in the conference's 10-year action plan programs to help them overcome their unique vulnerabilities.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Voice of America

AUTHOR: Steve Herman

DATE: 20 January

Top UN Official Vows of Asian Tsunami, 'Never Again'

KOBE -- While hailing the swift movement of aid to the victims of the earthquake and resulting tsunami that hit 12 countries, United Nations relief officials are putting plans into action to ease the deadly fall-out from future disasters of this scale. One of the major plan is to put in place a global system to warn of potential ocean disasters, which the United Nations hopes to start setting in place by next year. The U.N.'s top relief official, Jan Egeland, vows to implement tsunami education programs in communities around the world. The Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs says the scale of human suffering from the huge wave should never have happened. "Tens of thousands of parents sent their children down to the beach to swim when the tsunami was on its way," he said. "Many fishermen went out with their boats just before the tsunami struck. I think here in Kobe we should really be able say 'never, ever again.'" U.N. officials say the rescue and recovery response heralds a new era of cooperation among international agencies and governments and also between civil agencies and militaries. There have been no reports of starvation or widespread disease outbreaks, as had been feared. The global response to the tsunami and huge aid donations are raising hope at this conference that such generosity will help alleviate human misery around the world and will be repeated when fresh disasters strike. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies on Thursday said the Kobe conference will be a failure unless it goes beyond rhetoric. The federation says delegates from the 150 participating nations must take firm measures to substantially reduce the number of people killed and affected by natural disasters by 2015.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: United Press International

AUTHOR:

DATE: 20 January

Disaster confab focuses on hunger, disease

KOBE -- The U.N. World Food Program chief says hunger or related diseases claim nine times as many lives as war or natural disasters. In the wake of the Dec. 26 Indian Ocean tsunamis, WFP Executive Director James Morris Thursday said this stress is a new direction for the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe,

Japan. It has so far concentrated on creating a global early warning system for natural disasters. "Let me issue one word of warning," he told 4,000 delegates from 150 countries at the conclave. "The chronic hunger and malnutrition that afflicts 300 million children worldwide does not create the dramatic media coverage of a tsunami, but it causes far greater suffering. We cannot afford to lose sight of that fact. This too is an emergency." Morris pointed out WFP has been instrumental in setting up HEWSweb, or Humanitarian Early Warning Service, a Web site that combines data about natural hazards from multiple sources.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: New York Times

AUTHOR: James Brook

DATE: 21 January 2005

A consensus on tsunamis

KOBE -- With Japan promising to start stitching together immediately an emergency tsunami and earthquake warning system for the Indian Ocean, the United States promised Thursday "to do whatever it takes" to expand the warning system to the entire globe. "The United States feels that never again should lives be lost because a global tsunami warning system doesn't exist," Howard Baker Jr., American ambassador to Japan, told a United Nations disaster reduction conference of 4,000 delegates from 150 nations in Kobe. With the death and destruction of the Indian Ocean tsunami fresh in delegates' minds, a consensus among donor countries emerged that the global system would build on a tsunami warning system that has protected Pacific Rim countries for almost four decades and that the global effort would be coordinated by the United Nations. "In the matter of a year, at latest 18 months, there should be a basic regional capacity on tsunami early warning," Sálvano Briceño, director of the UN's disaster reduction body, told a news conference. He added that Japan had pledged about \$4 million and Sweden \$1.5 million toward the project. Japan, the conference's host, emerged as a leader in providing funding and technical support. All of \$500 million in tsunami relief grant aid pledged by Japan will be disbursed by the end of next week, Shuzen Tanigawa, Japan's senior vice minister for foreign affairs, said Thursday.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: IRIN News (OCHA)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 21 January

GLOBAL: Consensus and hopes for concrete outcomes at Kobe disaster conference

KOBE -- As the World Conference on Disaster Reduction [18-22 January] draws to a close in Kobe, Japan, delegates are feeling the pressure to come up with concrete outcomes from what has been described as the largest ever meeting on natural disasters. The week has been overshadowed by the "dark cloud" of the Indian Ocean tsunami, which the director of the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), Salvano Briceño, described as a "terrible coincidence and one that has helped raise awareness by taking place some days before the conference". The Indian Ocean disaster, induced by a massive earthquake off the Indonesian island of Sumatra on 26 December 2004, has directly affected at least 12 countries, claimed

more than 170,000 lives and left many thousands injured. The International Labour Organisation said in a statement that the tsunami had also destroyed the livelihood of at least one million people in the affected areas. The full economic damage done by the tsunami has not been estimated, but experts at the conference reckon it to be colossal, setting back development efforts and, according to one delegate from the Asian Development Bank, plunging millions of people into poverty. The conference, hosted by the Japanese government 10 years after the last world disaster summit - held in Yokohama - was planned for over two years. It comes at a time when national governments, international agencies and non-governmental organizations are calling for increased attention on disasters and substantial changes in how the world seeks to address them. Not only have the delegates been discussing the need for redoubled global efforts towards implementing early warning systems and disaster risk management, but the overriding consensus in Kobe is that the mechanisms for addressing disasters must be mainstreamed into strategies for sustainable development. No longer can the world afford to treat natural disasters as an optional area of concern or a separate pillar of assistance, delegates maintained. "As the world population expands, more people are affected by natural disasters," the ISDR's Briceno told IRIN, "The increase of mega-cities, environmental degradation, unplanned urban growth only increases vulnerability. So, although we have more awareness of disasters we also have a higher level of vulnerability - it's a double-edged sword." The loss of life and huge economic damage caused by a wide range of natural disasters each year are retarding development and undermining efforts to reduce poverty. Reducing poverty and accelerating development are the express objectives of major international agencies, international financial institutions (IFI) and donors' assistance policies. They are also at the heart of the Millennium Development Goals - a body of targets nations have set themselves for improving their peoples' wellbeing. "Only recently have we begun to understand the relationship between disasters and the erosion of development goals," IRIN was told by Anthony Spalton of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. "Because disaster prevention has fallen between the humanitarian and developmental sectors it has been under-resourced and under-valued." This view was echoed by conference delegates in Kobe from across the board, whether national delegations or development financiers, high-tech meteorologists or grassroots agencies. With the urgency created by the tsunami and the added energy that has given the conference, there has been a unanimous desire to see disaster risk reduction become an integral part of sustainable development planning. With more than 3,000 participants, including over 300 official delegations and agencies from 120-odd countries, the Kobe conference has the highest concentration of decision-makers, environmental scientists and experts who deal with disaster risk reduction, management, mitigation and response. Organisers told IRIN that the level of multi-national ministerial participation in the conference was low before the tsunami. After 26 December it rose considerably as applications from people wishing to register for the conference swelled. Despite the action-oriented mood of the summit some participants remain skeptical that anything concrete will emerge from the five-day gathering. They fear the 'outcomes document', currently being drafted, will fail to incorporate firm commitments and clear targets for a substantial reduction of the number of people affected by disasters globally. Eva Von Oefreich, chief of the Disaster Preparedness and Response Unit of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, warned on Thursday that "there is still time for a positive outcome but there is a very real danger that all we will get is rhetoric".

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press

AUTHOR: Kenji Hall
DATE: 21 January

U.N. disaster conference finalizes pact

KOBE -- Hundreds of delegates at a U.N. conference on disasters put the final touches on a pact Friday expected to express strong support for the world body to create a tsunami alert system and help poor nations gird against cyclones, floods and other natural calamities. But disputes over the wording of the document underscored differences over the cause of some disasters. The five-day meeting that wraps up Saturday in Kobe had been reorganized to focus on finding money and working out details for a tsunami warning system for southern Asia, following the Dec. 26 earthquake and killer waves that hammered the Asian and African coastlines. On Thursday, officials from the richest nations pledged roughly \$8 million to begin work on a new tsunami alert network in the Indian Ocean, expected to cost \$30 million and be operational by mid-2006. Scientists and government officials have agreed on the merits of an Indian Ocean system, which could have allowed coastal residents to flee to safety had it been in place last month. Many support setting up a network that also monitors the Mediterranean, Caribbean and other parts of the globe. However, they have disagreed about other issues on the conference agenda. The 25-nation European Union has backed poor island nations threatened by storms and rising ocean waters in pushing for a U.N. action plan - expected to be adopted at the Kobe conference - that makes numerous references to climate change as a possible cause of future natural disasters. But the U.S. delegation, along with officials from Australia and Canada, have opposed that, saying disaster reduction, not climate variability, should be the central issue of the "framework for action." The draft document had cited climate change as a factor in natural disasters and called for officials to identify "climate-related disaster risks." The two sides are working out a compromise that would only keep a few references to climate change, said Meinrad Studer, a member of the Swiss delegation. "I wouldn't call the talks rancorous, but I'd say they have gone round in circles," said Mark Lagon, deputy U.S. delegation head. The split reflects different stands on the Kyoto Protocol, which will force countries to curb their emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases when it takes effect Feb. 16. Those gases, which trap heat in the Earth's atmosphere, are believed to be the leading cause of global warming. Japan and European nations have been strong advocates of the Kyoto Protocol, while President Bush's administration has rejected it. A U.N.-organized group of scientists, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, said in a recent assessment of climate science that rising global temperatures could lead to more extreme weather patterns that trigger cyclones and droughts. Maryam Golnaraghi, who leads the Geneva-based World Meteorological Organization's disaster prevention, said the bickering remains "at the political level" and hasn't interfered with the conference's scientific workshops.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press

AUTHOR:

DATE: 21 January

U.N. Says Asian Tsunami Caused Severe Environmental Damage in Indonesia

KOBE -- Last month's devastating Asian tsunami caused US\$675 million (euro522 million) in environmental damage in Indonesia, wrecking mangroves, coral reefs and sea grass beds while hobbling sewerage and other vital systems, the U.N.

environmental agency said Friday. Klaus Toepfer, executive director of the U.N. Environment Program, said the results of a report by the Indonesian government, his agency and international donors showed the destruction to the environment was "even more alarming than previously feared." "It is clear the recovery and reconstruction process underway must ... invest in the environmental capital of natural resources, the forests, mangroves and coral reefs that are nature's buffer to such disasters and their consequences," Toepfer said in a statement. The Dec. 26 tsunami damaged some 25,000 hectares (61,8000 acres) of mangroves worth US\$118.2 million (euro91 million), and 30,000 hectares (74,130 acres) of coral reefs worth US\$332.4 million (euro257 million) in Sumatra, the report said. The resulting infiltration of salt water, sediment and sludge will require the rehabilitation of rivers and rural wells. Coastal forests and a 300-kilometer (200-mile) stretch of coastal lands were also damaged or lost, the report said. Other problem areas were the debris and waste caused by the tsunami, destruction of local environmental capacity -- such as solid-waste management -- and damage to oil depots and other industrial sites that could lead to leaks of harmful chemicals. Indonesia has asked UNEP to establish an environmental crisis center, and the Maldives has requested emergency waste management help and impact studies on coral reefs. Sri Lanka and Thailand have also asked for assistance in gauging damage to the environment, the UNEP said.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press

AUTHOR: Kozo Mizoguchi

DATE: 21 January 2005

Japan and U.S. to provide tsunami warnings to Indian Ocean

TOKYO -- Japan and the United States will provide tsunami warnings to countries around the Indian Ocean until the region establishes its own alert system, a Japanese official said Friday. Details of the plan will be discussed at a U.N.-sponsored conference on disaster reduction next week that will focus on the Dec. 26 earthquake and tsunami that killed more than 157,000 people in countries across Asia and Africa. Japan and the United States have the world's most advance warning systems. Japan's network of fiber-optic sensors feeds seismic activity data to a supercomputer, which can issue a warning of a deadly tsunami within two minutes of a quake. Takayuki Kawazu, an official at Japan's Meteorological Agency, said the United States and Japan will distribute information to Indian Ocean countries until they can develop their own system. "It will take time to obtain agreement among the tsunami-hit countries before a tsunami early warning system can be established," Kawazu said. It wasn't clear how long it would take to establish an alert system for the region. Experts say casualties could have been substantially reduced if people had been warned ahead of last month's disaster. More than 300 meteorological experts, including from countries worst-hit by the tsunami, such as Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the Maldives, will attend the U.N. World Conference on Disaster Reduction in the western port city of Kobe starting Tuesday, Kawazu said. Separately, Yoshinobu Nakahira, an official from the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport's River Bureau, warned that almost half of the breakwaters and seawalls lining Japan's coast are too low or untested. Nakahira, citing a survey from last May, also found that more than 70 percent of the country's 6,571 water gates would not fully close before a tsunami hit. "We found that our country's coastline wasn't adequately prepared for a large tsunami," Nakahira said Friday. The government has since earmarked 3 billion yen (US \$29 million; euro21.92 million) in

emergency funds to repair those barriers and improve evacuation routes, Nakahira said.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Cable News Network

AUTHOR:

DATE: 22 January 2005

U.N. group sets disaster plan

KOBE -- In the wake of last month's tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean, countries attending a United Nations conference on disaster reduction have agreed to pursue a plan aimed at reducing the risk posed by natural disasters. At the closing session of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction held in Kobe, Japan, 168 delegates adopted a framework for action regarding natural disasters. Called the Hyogo Framework for Action: 2005-2015, it "represents a substantive set of objectives to ensure that the world reduces risk and vulnerabilities to natural hazards in the next 10 years," said Jan Egeland, the U.N.'s undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs. The plan calls on nations, particularly those which are disaster-prone, to place disaster risk on political agendas and to invest in disaster preparedness. "This new plan will help reduce the gap between what we know and what we do," Egeland said. "The critical ingredient is political commitment." Delegates also adopted a declaration that recommends a "culture of disaster prevention and resilience" be fostered, and noting the relationship between disaster reduction, sustainable development and poverty reduction. The documents are non-binding, according to a statement issued after the conference's conclusion, but can serve as a blueprint in guiding nations and individuals toward developing more disaster-resilient communities. In addition, in a special session held on the tsunami, delegates pledged their support for the creation of a tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean, emphasizing the importance of international and regional cooperation. Meanwhile, aid groups have warned it might be too soon for the U.S. military to scale back its emergency operations for Asia's tsunami victims, as an informal cease-fire between Indonesian troops and rebels appeared to have collapsed, threatening to derail relief efforts. Speaking in Bangkok, Thailand, the U.N. special coordinator for tsunami relief, Margareta Wahlstrom, said she hoped the military would not leave immediately because the relief operations depend on its "resources and machinery." In Indonesia, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono joined tsunami survivors crowding mosques in ravaged Aceh province on Friday to mark Islam's holiest day, pledging to rebuild the region. Visiting the area that bore the brunt of last month's earthquake and tsunamis, Yudhoyono told residents it was time for unity in an apparent reference to the 30-year-old insurgency that has plagued the region.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press

AUTHOR: Charles J. Hanley

DATE: 22 January

Conference Ends With Plan for Tsunami Alert

KOBE -- The world's nations, united in shock over the Indian Ocean catastrophe, agreed Saturday to work together to better guard their people against natural disasters, by taking steps ranging from strengthening building codes to expanding

the monitoring of nature's upheavals. In a first concrete step four weeks after an earthquake-tsunami killed between 157,000 and 221,000 people, according to varying government tallies, the World Conference on Disaster Reduction laid groundwork for the first tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean, expected to be in place next year. The five-day, 168-nation U.N. conference concluded - after dozens of workshops and a final night of closed-door negotiation - by adopting a "framework for action," resolving to pursue "substantial reduction" of disaster losses in the next 10 years. This is "one of the most critical challenges" facing the world, a final declaration said, because cyclones, floods, earthquakes and other events set back human progress, especially in poor nations. Some were disappointed that the conference documents were non-binding, committed no new money to risk reduction and set no hard targets for assessing progress. Japan, for example, had proposed setting a goal of cutting water-related disaster deaths in half by 2015, but the U.S. delegation and others opposed such ideas. The international Red Cross said it would continue to advocate for firm targets and more aid for disaster preparedness in poor countries. "The international community has 2005 to make concrete its promises," said the relief agency's Eva von Oelreich. The chief U.N. official here, Jan Egeland, said he believed the 10-year action plan could halve disaster casualties by 2015. But "we must not fail in the implementation challenge." The Kobe conference, in a Japanese port city that suffered a crippling earthquake 10 years ago, brought together 4,000 diplomats, development specialists, scientists, economists, aid workers and others in an effort to channel experience and resources into building better human defenses against the worst of nature. Each day delegates could see the need - in the latest news video from coastlines ravaged by the giant waves spawned Dec. 26 by the great Sumatra earthquake. "It heightened our awareness of the importance of stepping up our joint efforts," said Marco Ferrari of Switzerland, drafting committee chairman for the conference, which was planned months before the Indian Ocean tsunami. In sideline meetings, richer nations pledged at least \$8 million toward the estimated \$30 million cost of a tsunami early warning network for the Indian Ocean, like the one long in place for the Pacific. With U.N. coordination, they hope to deploy the alert system by mid-2006. In the past 10 years, natural disasters have killed almost 700,000 people, affected more than 2.5 billion and cost an estimated \$690 billion in economic losses, according to Belgium's university-based Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters. The 24-page overall action plan calls on states and international organizations to "take into consideration" and "implement as appropriate" a lengthy series of steps to reduce vulnerability and guard against natural hazards. They range from establishing national disaster agencies, developing risk maps, and collecting better statistics on disaster impact, to building disaster-resistant hospitals, schools and other critical facilities, to teaching schoolchildren about disaster risks, and establishing alert systems easily understood by large, poor populations. The framework also cites "a need to enhance international and regional cooperation and assistance in the field of disaster risk reduction." Although the world has pledged some \$4 billion in relief aid for the Indian Ocean victims, the Kobe conference did not commit richer nations to boosting financial aid long-term for disaster prevention. Some aid organizations sharply criticized the lack of concrete commitments. "Disaster prevention is not an optional extra. It's an urgent necessity," said Marcus Oxley, of Britain's Tearfund group. The drafting committee needed lengthy negotiations to reach a compromise in another area - climate change. The United States, oil-producing countries and some others resisted mentions in the final documents of the fact that a scientific consensus warns that global warming, believed largely caused by emissions of such "greenhouse gases" as carbon dioxide, a byproduct of fossil-fuel burning, is expected to increase the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. In the end, some references were retained and others were deleted, including a sentence reading, "The increased disaster risks are an important motivation towards mitigating greenhouse gas

emissions." The Kyoto Protocol, effective Feb. 16, mandates reductions in such emissions by industrial nations, but the United States, the biggest emitter, rejects the pact, saying it would hurt the U.S. economy.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press

AUTHOR: Joseph Coleman

DATE: 22 January

Tsunami Warning System Wins Endorsement

KOBE -- An early warning system would have made all the difference. Instead of being swept to their deaths by the Dec. 26 tsunami, tourists in Thailand and villagers in Sri Lanka could have been alerted to run for higher ground. Even Sumatrans near the epicenter might have recognized the danger posed by a coastal quake and dashed inland. The global push to set up such a warning network for the Indian Ocean and beyond won wide endorsement and an injection of funding — \$8 million — at a U.N. conference on natural disasters that closed in Kobe, Japan, on Saturday with vows to never again be hit by such a calamity unprepared. "All disaster-prone people deserve to have early warning systems, not just the Indian Ocean," said Jan Egeland, U.N. undersecretary general for humanitarian affairs. "The tsunami was the wake-up call for all of us." The network — an extension of a decades-old system in the Pacific — was at the center of the five-day 168-nation World Conference of Disasters Reduction, which adopted a broad plan to cut the deaths and material losses from cyclones, earthquakes and other catastrophes. Egeland set the ambitious goal of halving the number of such deaths, which he estimated to total between 500,000 and 750,000 over the past decade, during the next 10 years. The nonbinding plan, however, did not include numerical targets, disappointing health and anti-poverty activists. "The targets at the beginning of this process (in March 2004) were very strong," said Ben Wisner, a hazard vulnerability specialist at the London School of Economics. "They have been tremendously watered down." Despite the disagreements over the wider disaster reduction package, diplomats, development specialists, scientists, economists and aid workers at the conference were united in a determination to quickly cobble together a warning network capable of sending bulletins to member states. The final success of the network, however, depends in large part on the abilities of member states to quickly distribute warnings to residents in potential disaster zones — something that would not be easy in the poor coastal villages that ring much of the Indian Ocean. The chief model for the plan is the system now operating in the Pacific, centered in Honolulu, Hawaii, which gathers seismic and sea level and pressure data and issues tsunami alerts to 26 countries. The system, begun in 1965, will cover for the Indian Ocean while the new network is constructed. The United Nations (news - web sites) says a warning system in the Indian Ocean will cost roughly \$30 million. About \$8 million, enough to get the program off the ground, has already been pledged by Japan, Sweden, the European Union (news - web sites) and others. Experts agree that while such systems suffer from high false alarm rates and cannot always quickly forecast the size of a tsunami, they would have gone a long way toward limiting the devastation wrought in the Dec. 26 tragedy that killed between 157,000 and 221,000 people, according to varying government tallies. "You'd have a way to detect the earthquake, detect the wave and forecast how high it's going to hit the coast," said Laura Kong, director of the International Tsunami Information Center in Honolulu. "It's very possible that the deaths we saw ... many of them would not have occurred."

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press

AUTHOR: Charles J. Hanley

DATE: 23 January

Group: Majority Have No Insurance Access

KOBE -- When the tsunami's roiling waters poured through Banda Aceh, some small merchants tried frantically to rescue their precious goods or save their shops, rather than flee to safety in their upstairs homes. And there they died - in their uninsured businesses. A U.N. economist, Ricardo Zapata, cites this tragic example from the Indonesian city to illustrate a sad fact of life among the Maldives fishermen, Sri Lankan farmers and grieving families in a dozen nations swept over by last month's catastrophic waves: Almost no one in such poor developing lands has insurance. "We're talking here about people who don't have the actual means to cover insurance," Zapata told a session of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction. Industry experts estimate that 80 percent of the world's people have no realistic access to life and property insurance. Even before the earthquake-tsunami devastated Indian Ocean coastlines, the industry paid out \$40 billion in claims for disaster damage in 2004, largely because of hurricanes in Florida and typhoons in Japan. It was its costliest year ever, but an additional \$90 billion in economic losses were not insured, reports the Munich Re Group, the German reinsurance giant. "There's a very well developed insurance market in some developing countries," said Munich Re's Thomas Loster, a "geo risks" researcher. "But there is a series of countries where there's no insurance, when, of course, losses do not stop at the border line. We have to find a way to deal with that." Finding a way to finance disaster risk in poor countries dominated hours of discussions at the conference, which ended Saturday after five days and dozens of workshops at which scientists, economists and others sought better approaches to protecting populations against natural disasters. Aid agencies, governments and ordinary people in the developing world have tried various financial tools for protecting against catastrophic risk: In a few countries, "micro-insurance" schemes cover poor breadwinners with, typically, \$1,000 life insurance policies in exchange for relatively tiny premium payments. Cooperatives in the Philippines operate such plans, for example. But they're often rooted in local cultural practices, and for-profit insurance companies find the numbers too large and the revenue too small, to justify the overhead. _With financial support from the World Bank, Turkey introduced a mandatory home-insurance plan nationwide in 2001, after a series of devastating earthquakes. It's the sole provider of coverage up to \$30,000, and ends a long-standing practice of government financing for rebuilding quake-wrecked housing. Taiwan and Algeria have since developed similar plans. The World Bank and U.N. World Food Program have begun a pilot program in Ethiopia using "catastrophe bonds" to insure the 2006 food crop. Investors receive high interest payments on such bonds, but if the disaster occurs during its term, all or part of the principal is converted to financing the cost of recovery - in this case purchase of emergency food if the crop succumbs to drought. The World Food Program is also interested in "weather derivatives," essentially a hedging tool for betting on specified temperatures or precipitation. The WFP could buy derivatives, so that if a drought and crop failure drive up prices for its food purchases, the derivative payoff helps cover the higher cost. The U.N. conference here called on governments and international organizations to work to develop "financial risk-sharing mechanisms" against disasters. The approaches tried so far all have their shortcomings. Costly "cat bonds" and derivatives don't directly help poor

individuals in the developing world. Micro-insurance requires the right socio-economic setting. And the Turkish plan leans on a contingency credit guarantee from the World Bank. As for the international insurance industry, "they're not running in that direction," Loster said. He and others point out that traditional insurers want a context of stable laws and regulations, and customers with clear property rights - something often lacking in poorer countries. "There's no initiative by the private sector in the uninsured world," Loster said. "There's a strong need for better public-private partnerships" - that is, partial underwriting by intergovernmental agencies. A veteran U.N. specialist in disaster reduction agreed that only international aid subsidies will change the insurance picture in the developing world. "At conferences like this 20 years ago, people talked about how we have to get insurance into poor developing countries," said Andrew Maskrey, of the U.N. Development Program. "Despite the talks and attempts, we haven't seen anything materialize in a big way."

END ITEM

MEDIUM: United Press International

AUTHOR:

DATE: 22 January

U.N. completes disaster plan

KOBE -- Delegates to the U.N. World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Japan finished their work Saturday with plans to create a tsunami alert system. "This conference commenced in the shadow of the Indian Ocean disaster and ends with a strong message of hope and promise in the form and the shape of the Hyogo Declaration and the Framework of Action document," said Jan Egeland, U.N. Undersecretary General for Humanitarian Affairs. "It is my personal conviction that through the faithful implementation of this action plan, in the next 10 years, the number of deaths caused by natural disasters should be halved compared to the last decade. This will mean the saving of hundreds of thousands of lives and many millions of livelihoods," he said. The representatives of 168 countries and numerous international organizations agreed to support U.N.-led plans to establish a tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean by June 2006 and ones covering other coastal areas of the world by June 2007, Kyodo said.

END ITEM

JAPANESE MEDIA (ENGLISH TEXT)

MEDIUM: Yomiuri Shimbun

AUTHOR:

DATE: 18 January 2005

Conference set to create framework

OSAKA -- The U.N. World Conference on Disaster Reduction, which opens Tuesday in Kobe, is expected to create an international framework to prevent or reduce damage from a disaster similar to that, which devastated countries around the Indian Ocean. But differences are expected between developed and developing countries about financing such an international framework. The United Nations designated the 1990s the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction. The first world disaster-reduction conference was held in Yokohama in 1994, and this one marks the 10th anniversary of the Great Hanshin Earthquake. Lessons learned from the Hanshin earthquake include the need for city planners to place greater priority on safety and security over convenience, efficiency and development. The rehabilitation program for the areas stricken by the Hanshin earthquake stressed: -- Strengthening infrastructure, including public transportation systems, and electricity, gas and water supplies. -- Making houses and public facilities more quake-resistant. -- Preparing and improving key facilities for disaster relief and medical services in cases of disasters. An initial delay by central and local governments in responding to the earthquake, along with a lack of cooperation between authorities and disaster relief organizations, including the Self-Defense Forces, were identified as contributing to the extensive damage and loss of life. The question of how to establish a crisis management system also came into focus as a result of the quake, prompting recognition of the need to strengthen cooperation and information-sharing between prefectural, city, town and village governments, firefighting authorities, police and the SDF. With 1.38 million volunteers rushing to the scene of the Hanshin earthquake, 1995 became known as the "year of the volunteer" in Japan. The main task ahead is to build a network between volunteers and nongovernmental organizations to cope with huge natural disasters. Care at evacuation sites and evacuation of elderly and handicapped people also pose a problem. More than 200 booths at the conference will address the experiences and problems that have arisen from such disasters. At the conference, the government plans to pledge 4 million dollars in aid toward an early warning system for earthquakes and tsunami in the Indian Ocean. The Yokohama Strategy, adopted at the 1994 conference, set out guiding principles for disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation, but implementation was hampered by a lack of funding. To make the Yokohama Strategy effective, the Kobe conference is expected to adopt an international disaster-reduction plan that includes strengthening international organizations to help mitigate damage, establishing a subsidy system for disaster prevention, and establishing a new international fund to support developing countries. But opinions are still divided between developed and developing countries about financial contributions to the plan. At a preparatory meeting in Geneva last autumn, South American and African nations sought forgiveness of debts that could hinder investment in disaster mitigation, and the establishment of a system to provide financial support to countries lacking in disaster-reduction measures.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: The Japan Times
AUTHOR: Eric Johnston
DATE: 19 January

Early warning system key topic at Kobe conference

KOBE -- Less than a month after Indian Ocean tsunamis killed 150,000 people, a major conference on natural disasters opened Tuesday in Kobe with high expectations it will lead to the establishment of early warning systems in those parts of the world where none exists. U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan makes his opening remarks Tuesday via video at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe. The United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction had long been planned, bringing together more than 4,000 delegates from 150 countries and U.N. agencies, international organizations and NGOs involved in international disaster relief. But the Dec. 26 tsunamis and subsequent international criticism that the response by wealthy nations was too slow have created pressure on delegates to adopt concrete measures to set up early warning systems and coordinate postdisaster relief efforts. "Rarely has a conference been so topical and so timely. There was an unprecedented global response to the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster, but it not enough. We must prevent such disasters," U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan said in a prerecorded message during the opening ceremonies. Jan Egeland, U.N. undersecretary general for humanitarian affairs, called for action to be taken quickly. "Within the next 10 years, all countries should adopt clear, goal-oriented disaster reduction policies, and people-centered early warning systems serving vulnerable communities should be put in place in all disaster-prone regions of the world," Egeland said. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi said Japan, which has already pledged more than \$500 million for the tsunami relief effort, is ready to participate in a number of specific measures. "We are ready to assist with the establishment of an early warning mechanism for tsunamis in the Indian Ocean," he said. "We will do this through bilateral cooperation and support for UNESCO and other international organizations. "As an immediate step, Japan will implement training courses through the Japan International Cooperation Agency and make a financial contribution to the U.N. International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR)," Koizumi said. But as the conference began, tough questions remained about an early warning system for both the Indian Ocean region and the world. Several delegates said Germany was leading the push to hold another conference on the logistics of an international system before any concrete action is taken by the U.N. Edelgard Bulmahn, German minister of education and research, confirmed that Germany desires another conference on disaster risk management methods to ensure all regions are thoroughly evaluated before any sort of international disaster reduction program is introduced. There were also differences in opinion between the Chinese and the Japanese delegations over whether to emphasize an international early warning system for earthquakes, which is what China is said to favor, or tsunamis, which Japan reportedly wants to prioritize. Of major contention is who will pay for such systems. While members of the Group of Eight have traditionally taken the lead in funding for both early warning systems and postdisaster relief efforts, Egeland said some newly rich countries in Asia and elsewhere could be doing more. When asked if he was referring to China, he said Beijing has done and is doing a lot, but repeated that newly rich countries can do more. "Over the next 10 years, a minimum of 10 percent of the billions now spent on disaster relief by all nations should be earmarked for disaster risk reduction," Egeland said. "Disaster reduction efforts must be part of an overall development strategy, and we must put aside fear of expense," he said. A debt moratorium on the countries affected by the Indian Ocean tsunamis was announced last week by the Paris Club of creditor nations. But

the Kobe conference is not expected to push for either partial or full cancellation of such debts, something that a number of nongovernmental organizations have urged as a way to free up funds for rebuilding efforts. And NGOs warned the delegates that any concrete action adopted for disaster reduction measures should not overemphasize technology. "You cannot prevent disaster by building infrastructure alone. It isn't enough to know a tsunami is coming. Unless a community knows what to do, the vulnerable will continue to perish in large numbers," says Markku Niskala, secretary general of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Kyodo

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January 2005

Experts discuss Indian Ocean tsunami warning systems

KOBE -- Participants at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction began a session Wednesday to discuss possible tsunami warning systems for the Indian Ocean area, where a giant tsunami killed more than 170,000 last month. The special expert-level session on the second day of the five-day conference in Kobe is expected to compile a report to be presented for consideration at Thursday's intergovernmental session on the subject, conference officials said. According to informed sources, a draft of the report to be adopted in Wednesday's session calls on the global community to ensure that the proposed tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean is fully operational in two to three years. The session will review the tsunami early warning system in the Pacific Ocean and identify functions to be enhanced in order to establish a similar system for the Indian Ocean region, the officials said. The Indian Ocean version is envisioned to contain national systems coordinated with the support of an international center that issues tsunami early warning information to them, they said. Other events scheduled for Wednesday are plenary sessions in which delegations will give reports on their disaster reduction efforts, a high-level round table discussion on emerging risks and public forum sessions on protecting human life from natural hazards. Japan Meteorological Agency Director General Koichi Nagasaka will chair the session, to be attended by experts from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the Maldives, which were devastated by the tsunami, and other countries as well as international organizations. The special session is organized by the JMA, the Cabinet Office and the Land, Infrastructure and Transport Ministry from the Japanese government, as well as the Kobe-based Asian Disaster Reduction Center and the UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Kyodo

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January 2005

Communication, education essential for effective warning system

KOBE -- Disaster alert systems will not be effective without infrastructure to disseminate information and education for the public on the proper response, panelists at the U.N. World Conference on Disaster Reduction said Wednesday.

While stressing the importance of better global cooperation to share information and technologies on risk management, the participants at a high-level round-table session also emphasized the need for capacity building on regional and local levels. "The provision of early warning systems without the corresponding infrastructure to disseminate information and also to teach people how to react to disasters will be useless," said Joseph Odei, national coordinator of Ghana's National Disaster Management Organization. "The Indian Ocean tsunami reveals how unprepared developing countries are in the face of natural disasters," he said, referring to the Dec. 26 catastrophe that killed about 170,000 people. "The population has to be educated on the impact of disasters, including preparedness, prevention, mitigation and recuperation efforts." China's Minister of Civil Affairs Li Xueju called for more bilateral and multilateral exchanges on knowledge and expertise in the field of disaster reduction. "Developed countries should take effective measures to increase their assistance to developing countries, particularly in helping to develop capacity building in dealing with disaster risk," Li said in the session held on the second day of the five-day world conference. The call for more international cooperation was echoed by Ashok Kumar Rastogi, secretary of India's Home Affairs Ministry, who proposed that national and global platforms be established to improve access to the latest know-how and tools of disaster prevention and management. In addition, capability for local authorities to prepare for and respond to disasters is also important. "We are recommending that disaster management be decentralized to the level of local authorities," said Daniel Biau, deputy director of the U.N. Human Settlements Program. "Local authorities must be assisted to develop local plans for disaster prevention and to ensure that those are kept up-to-date," he said. Meanwhile, Grenadian Prime Minister Keith Mitchell urged for attention to global climate changes that are threatening many small island developing states including Grenada. As proper policy planning can mitigate most material and human losses in natural disasters, Mitchell suggested that efforts be made to adopt measures such as realistic building codes and setting up public insurance for the poor that are most prone to damage from disasters. More than 4,500 participants from about 150 countries as well as U.N. agencies and nongovernmental organizations have gathered at the world conference to discuss disaster reduction issues and an early tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Kyodo

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January 2005

Experts propose tsunami watch in Indian Ocean before warning system

KOBE -- Experts on tsunami warning systems proposed Wednesday that a tsunami watch plan be implemented in the Indian Ocean in six months as a provisional measure before putting in place a full-fledged tsunami warning system in several years. At a special expert-level session of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, the participants agreed that the mechanisms of the existing warning system for the Pacific Ocean can technically be applied to the Indian Ocean. But they emphasized the need for extensive cooperation and coordination among relevant parties, support by the international community and commitments from countries at risk to come up with tsunami mitigation plans. "The session recognized the effectiveness of sharing the experience of the tsunami early warning system in the Pacific Ocean," Koichi Nagasaka, director general of the Japan Meteorological Agency and chair of the gathering, said in summarizing Wednesday's talks. At the

outset of the session, U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Director General Koichiro Matsuura emphasized the need for international and regional cooperation and free exchange of data for an effective tsunami warning system. "The Pacific Ocean system is functioning well and provides a framework of good cooperation among major countries in the region such as the (United States) and Japan. The absence of a similar system in the Indian Ocean lies behind the devastating impact" of the Dec. 26 tsunami, Matsuura said. "UNESCO stands ready to transfer to the Indian Ocean region, with the shortest delay possible, the knowledge and experience it has accumulated in establishing and operating the Pacific Ocean system," he added. The Indian Ocean tsunami disaster, induced by a massive earthquake off Indonesia's Sumatra Island, has claimed more than 170,000 lives and affected a dozen countries surrounding the body of water. Matsuura said the system, set up in 1965 by the UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, can also be used to create early warning systems in other oceans and seas, as well as to set up an integrated global network. A summary of the session, held on the second day of the five-day conference organized by the United Nations, compiled by Nagasaka will be presented for consideration at Thursday's intergovernmental session on the subject. The chairman's summary is expected to call on the global community to ensure that a full-fledged tsunami warning system will be in place for the Indian Ocean in two to three years and to consider applying it to other risk areas, such as the Mediterranean and the Caribbean Sea. Representatives from four countries affected by the tsunamis --Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Thailand and the Maldives -- gave brief presentations on the damage they suffered and the steps they are taking to recover and to set up mitigation plans. The special thematic session was organized by the Japan Meteorological Agency, the Cabinet Office and the Land, Infrastructure and Transport Ministry, as well as the Kobe-based Asian Disaster Reduction Center and the UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission. Other conference events scheduled for Wednesday are plenary sessions in which delegations will report on their disaster reduction efforts, a high-level round table discussion on emerging risks and public forum sessions on protecting human life from natural hazards.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Kyodo

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January 2005

UNESCO to start work on Indian Ocean tsunami warning in March

KOBE -- The U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization will begin work on establishing a tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean in March with the aim of launching it in June 2006, a UNESCO official said Wednesday. UNESCO Assistant Director General Patricio Bernal said in Kobe that the U.N. organization plans to hold a technical meeting in March in Paris to bring together all the proposals that have been presented and build a single action plan as well as launch a working group to tackle the task. The meeting will involve between 50 and 80 experts from different countries as well as members of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission to consider the proposals and seek the most appropriate response for the Indian Ocean, he said. Countries such as Japan and the United States are among parties that have offered ideas for putting in place an effective tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean. "Our challenge -- and we took this very early on -- is we feel that we need to provide the common platform to bring the coordination of all these efforts. And we have been consulting many others," Bernal said of the body's activities since last month's deadly Indian Ocean

tsunamis that killed more than 170,000. The working group, also including affected countries around the Indian Ocean, is expected to organize the transfer of technology used in the tsunami early warning system for the Pacific Ocean to the Indian Ocean. "I think we are confident that we can put an initial early warning system in one year," Bernal told a press conference on the sidelines of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction being held through Saturday in this western Japan port city. "But this must be based on certain assumptions. We cannot expect to innovate with new technologies. We have to use the systems that are in place," he said, adding there is already a worldwide seismic network and a sea level network in the Indian Ocean. "It doesn't take much to (create) the organization that can handle this," Bernal said. UNESCO has also said it plans to extend the anticipated Indian Ocean system worldwide by June 2007. Bernal, who also serves as IOC executive secretary, said the "organizational estimate" to put the system in place is around \$13 million and the money will come from a flash appeal made through the U.N. Development Program and the U.N. International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. In the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, some participants are at odds over whether to include the timeline for realizing a system for the Indian Ocean into an action plan to be adopted on the final day Saturday. At the same press conference, Peter Pissierssens, head of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission's Ocean Services, indicated the world community should not be satisfied with just putting a system in place in the Indian Ocean and expand it to other areas at risk because the next big killer tsunami that might occur around the globe following last month's is unlikely to hit the same region. "We've had a massive tsunami in the Indian Ocean (but) the next one will most probably not be the Indian Ocean, so we need to use the interest that exists now for tsunamis to make sure that we can also protect other regions of the world," Pissierssens said. While the catastrophe has put the spotlight on tsunamis -- an infrequent natural disaster -- and on plans to quickly set up an early warning system for the Indian Ocean, there should be a more integrated system also involving other ocean-related hazards, Pissierssens said.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Kyodo

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January 2005

UNESCO official sees education vital in reducing disaster damage

KOBE -- UNESCO Assistant Director General for Natural Sciences Walter Erdelen urged the global community Wednesday to build a culture of disaster risk prevention by educating people about lessons learned from past natural disasters. "Disaster reduction must be an integral part of any public awareness and educational programs," Erdelen said in a speech at a public forum in Kobe as part of a five-day global conference on disaster reduction. "Prevention is better than the cure," he said, adding that such education must begin at an early stage. Drills involving disaster simulation would be effective, he said. Erdelen said disaster education should be one of the central pillars of the decade from 2005 to 2015, designated as the United Nations' decade of education for sustainable development. Meanwhile, other speakers at the forum, who experienced the devastating 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake that hit Kobe and its vicinity, also shared the view that awareness and education is the only way to limit damage from future natural disasters. Nobuo Oishi, a senior official of a voluntary disaster reduction society in Nishinomiya, Hyogo Prefecture, said, "What we need to do is to educate everyone on a local community level to strengthen the ability of the community as a whole to reduce the damage

from disasters." Ichiro Kodani, the principal of Nishitani Municipal Elementary School in Takarazuka, Hyogo Prefecture, said it is vital for schools to keep in close contact with the local community in educating children about natural disasters. "We need to further step up education on disaster reduction," Kodani said. "We need to be aware that natural disasters could occur anywhere, anytime." In a separate session of the public forum, participants expressed the importance of training medical personnel so that they can promptly respond to natural disasters. Shinichi Nakayama, vice director of the Hyogo Emergency Medical Center, said, "I must say that up until the Great Hanshin Earthquake, medical workers in western Japan didn't have any knowledge or training about how to provide medical services at times of a natural disaster." One of the lessons from the 1995 quake is that hospitals need to share information so that victims can be treated swiftly and effectively, Nakayama said, adding that it led to the introduction of an information system among hospitals in Hyogo Prefecture. "I believe it is important for us to share knowledge with the rest of the world and further strengthen education about providing medical services when there is a natural disaster," he said. The U.N. World Conference on Disaster Reduction will be held through Saturday.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Kyodo

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January 2005

Natural disasters caused \$140 bil. economic loss in 2004

KOBE -- Natural disasters caused \$140 billion of economic losses last year, the second highest on record, and made 2004 the costliest year ever in terms of natural catastrophes for the insurance industry, with benefit payments totaling more than \$40 billion, a reinsurance company said in a recent report. The report by Munich Re Group particularly notes that the losses were dominated by weather-related disasters and said that the impact of climate change will develop into a serious danger unless radical measures are taken soon. The total economic losses were double that of the mean value of \$70 billion for the last 10 years and were second only to the record set in 1995 attributed to the Great Hanshin Earthquake that killed 6,433 people in Japan. The economic losses last year included \$72.69 billion in Asia, mainly due to earthquakes, and \$62.97 billion in North and South America, predominantly due to windstorms. Based on data as of Jan. 10, the report also shows that Asian countries affected by disasters last year are far behind the Americas in taking on insurance. While total economic losses in Asia exceeded those of the Americas by almost \$1 billion, insured losses in Asia were only one-fifth of those in the Americas -- \$6.89 billion compared to \$32.5 billion. "Traditional insurance is not available in many poor and developing countries because there is no market, as people have no money to pay premiums," said Thomas Loster, a geographer at the German reinsurance firm's geo risks research department. The record number of 10 typhoons that made landfall in Japan last year caused economic losses of more than \$10 billion and insurance payments of more than \$5 billion, the report says. A magnitude 6.6 earthquake that struck Japan's Niigata Prefecture in October generated economic losses of around \$30 billion and insured losses of \$450 million. "We find mounting evidence that extreme weather disasters and outstanding single-event losses are increasing dramatically in both frequency and severity," the report says, advocating radical measures at the political, social and economic levels. Other major disasters in 2004 listed in the report include the Dec. 26 tsunami catastrophe in the Indian Ocean that killed about 170,000 people, the four hurricanes that hit Florida, and extreme floods

that killed more than 2,000 people in the Caribbean and over 2,500 in South Asia. The report, called Topics Geo, was issued as a special edition on the occasion of the five-day U.N. World Conference on Disaster Reduction that began Tuesday in Kobe.
END ITEM

MEDIUM: Asahi Shimbun
AUTHOR: Taro Karasaki
DATE: 19 January 2005

U.N.: JAPAN COULD PLAY KEY ROLE IN DISASTER PREVENTION

KOBE -- The top U.N. official for disaster-reduction promotion is on a mission to change the way countries think about reconstruction. Specifically, he wants them to think about future risks when they rebuild, and he believes Japan can play a key role in that process. Salvano Briceno is the director of the Inter-Agency Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. His group organized the World Conference on Disaster Reduction that began Tuesday in Kobe. Briceno told The Asahi Shimbun the conference will adopt an action plan Saturday on disaster-awareness programs. The plans to beef up the world's readiness will stretch across a decade. Briceno said that Japan can contribute by sharing its experience with disasters. He welcomed a plan by Tokyo to set up a special center in Kobe later this year to provide expertise in combining disaster-reduction programs and reconstruction efforts. "There are many measures that need to be improved, from education about risk reduction to land-use planning, and even setting up an early warning system," Briceno said. One of the recurring problems in reconstruction is that countries often focus on recreating previous structures rather than reducing risk factors, he said. "The key is not to just reconstruct and provide people a habitat they had before, but to do it in a way that reduces the risk rather than reproducing the vulnerability," Briceno said. He said that Japan "has a great deal to share," both in technology and capacity. Briceno stressed that it was important that countries like Japan work closely with the United Nations instead of unilaterally. "It is difficult for a rich country to work bilaterally with a poor country because the realities are different," Briceno said, adding that the United Nations would combine experts from various countries to share expertise. Briceno said the special center Tokyo is planning to set up in May in Kobe could be considered a U.N. facility. If recognized as a U.N. organ, the center would be the latest in a line of U.N. offices in Japan, including the Disaster Management Planning Office of the U.N. Center for Regional Development in Kobe. He said details would be discussed with Japanese officials after the conference. The new center would basically disseminate information on disaster-reduction programs, particularly pertaining to earthquakes.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Daily Yomiuri
AUTHOR: Hiroyuki Ueba
DATE: 19 January 2005

Ogata: U.N. must take lead in aid efforts

KOBE - Sadako Ogata, president of the Japan International Cooperation Agency, urged the United Nations to play a leading role in international efforts to rebuild tsunami-hit nations in the Indian Ocean. The former U.N. high commissioner for refugees, who was attending the U.N. World Conference on Disaster Reduction in

Kobe, said in an interview with The Daily Yomiuri that reconstruction programs should include damage reduction and disaster-prevention measures. Ogata said, "It's appropriate that the United Nations coordinate assistance activities to provide aid to the people and regions affected by this unprecedented disaster." However, she added that participation by major countries was also necessary if aid efforts were to be successful. "The United Nations is an intergovernmental organization," Ogata said. "So when several major nations show their willingness to be actively involved in assistance activities, things generally go well." "In the case of natural disasters, the problems are not political at all. Instead, many countries often compete to provide resources for aid via the United Nations," she said. Ogata expected that the emergency phase following the tsunami, in which immediate medical and other types of assistance would be provided, would last about six months, but it would take at least five years to see the results of reconstruction efforts. She said, "It's necessary to establish a foundation for reconstruction even now to make a smooth transition from emergency aid efforts to the longer reconstruction phase." Ogata said Japan's disaster-relief contributions, as a leading Asian country, had been adequate in both amount and the speed with which it was delivered. "If Japan provided only a small amount of financial aid in its own region, other countries might have been disillusioned," she said. "So Japan's 500 million dollars aid pledge was adequate and it was announced in good time, I think." She was also delighted with the government's plan to increase its official development assistance for disaster reduction.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Daily Yomiuri

AUTHOR: Hiroyuki Ueba and Hiroko Ihara

DATE: 20 January 2005

Tsunami warning system discussed

KOBE -- Experts confirmed at the U.N. World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe that countries around the Indian Ocean should take primary responsibility for establishing an early tsunami warning system there, but that support from the international community would be forthcoming. Tsunami and meteorological experts from the Indian Ocean nations and other nations agreed at a special session that a provisional tsunami warning system should be set up in the regions within the next six months using an existing warning center in Hawaii. They plan to use existing telecommunications systems and current seismic and sea level data obtained in the Pacific Ocean. They also agreed that a permanent tsunami warning system should be launched within three years. The report will be submitted to a plenary session scheduled for Thursday morning. The participants agreed that it was necessary to develop an integrated strategy for the establishment of the warning system in the region. They said it would be necessary to train tsunami warning system operators before the establishment of a permanent warning system. Koichi Nagasaka, director general of the Meteorological Agency, wrapped up the discussion, saying, "The currently available means of communication are adequate to deliver tsunami warnings to those at risk in coastal areas, and it will also be important to educate the public on tsunami." He continued, "Providing the countries with information about tsunami, tsunami hazard maps and operating system technology for issuing tsunami warnings should be sufficient," adding that the international community could support the development of human resources in the countries. During the session, Laura Kong, director of the International Tsunami Information Center, said raising people's awareness was as important as establishing a tsunami warning system. Prih Harjadi,

director of Indonesia's Geophysical Data and Information Center, said, "Our country lacks the necessary system for automatic real-time data processing and integrated tide gauges." But he added that Indonesia planned to increase its five seismograph networks to 10 in response to the recent disaster and would introduce other systems necessary for issuing tsunami warnings. Kriengkrai Khovadhana, deputy director general of the Thai Meteorological Department, explained the country's plan for preventing future tsunami disasters, which include a monitoring and warning system. He asked for other countries' assistance, especially in regards to the technology necessary for the monitoring system because it was unavailable. UNESCO to set up task force - UNESCO officials said in a press conference after the special session that they planned to establish a global tsunami warning system by June 2007. One of the main issues at the conference has been the introduction of an early tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean, similar to the system active in the Pacific Ocean. UNESCO, however, believes the move should be expanded beyond the Indian Ocean region. The organization sees this as a good occasion to build a global warning system, as recognition is still high that the large number of casualties was caused by the lack of a warning system. At the press conference, Peter Pissierssens, an official from UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), said, "Interest in a tsunami warning system could fade in a few months, so we are really trying to get the train out of the station while the interest is still high." UNESCO will set up an international team within 60 days to study and coordinate technology transfer and other assistance among participating nations at the conference in Kobe. Before a meeting of the organization in July, the team will draw up an outline for a global warning system, according to UNESCO. Patricio Bernal, executive secretary of IOC, said technical proposals would hopefully be discussed at an IOC meeting in March. The meeting is to be attended by more than 50 experts on tsunami and related issues. Bernal also stressed the participation of the nations affected by the recent tsunami, saying: "A warning system for the Indian Ocean must be owned by the nations of the Indian Ocean. There will be strong elements of governance here."
END ITEM

MEDIUM: Asahi Shimbun
AUTHOR: Taro Karasaki
DATE: 20 January 2005

DISASTER PREPARATIONS

KOBE -- Japan and the United States will work together to expand the scope of their monitoring facilities to provide a temporary disaster-warning system for Indian Ocean nations, officials said Wednesday. But the battle among several nations to set up a permanent warning system within the Indian Ocean is expected to heat up, raising concerns that intense competition could delay a consensus on the plan. The United Nations Educational, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO) is expected to decide on the permanent system in March. For now, the temporary setup espoused by Tokyo and Washington received endorsement Wednesday at a special experts' session at the U.N. World Disaster Reduction Conference being held here through Saturday. The panel, discussing the Dec. 26 tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean, agreed that the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center based in Hawaii and the Japanese Meteorological Agency would serve as the core of the temporary system. The center in Hawaii detects tsunami in the Pacific Ocean and can relay warnings to countries likely to be hit. The center also detected the magnitude 9 earthquake off of Indonesia's Sumatra on Dec. 26. But the center has no effective means to deliver information to the Indian Ocean nations and could not issue a tsunami warning.

There is no tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean, a factor that contributed to the death toll of more than 160,000. Panel members Wednesday said they would work to set up communication lines linking the center with the stricken countries. Japan's expertise in tsunami warnings would be incorporated into the system. Participants also agreed that the permanent monitoring system would be set up with the support of the international community and organizations, possibly in two to three years. The plan is to not only use existing technology but to also nurture knowledge on tsunami. Some members proposed the system be integrated to warn against other natural disasters, such as cyclones and flooding. "An effective tsunami warning system can exist only through international regional cooperation that respects the principle of open, free and unrestricted exchange of observational data," UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura said in an keynote speech. He added that he hopes to see the temporary system operating within a year. The special panel's proposal on the temporary system is expected to receive approval from delegation heads today. Organizers of the conference also hope to agree today on a basic outline for the permanent tsunami-warning system. Many countries have expressed a desire to lead the effort to set up the system. Developed countries have proposed establishing monitoring stations in the Indian Ocean, while others have offered technical assistance, such as seismographs and tide-monitoring devices. "We recognize that the ability to monitor seismic activity is low in that region, and we can help with monitoring technology," said Zhu Shilong, director of the China Earthquake Administration and one of several delegates who made presentations. But experts have raised concerns that the race to take the initiative in setting up the system could become bogged down by feuds. "I think we were able to reach a realistic agreement on a tentative system today. But it will take some time to consolidate the various opinions raised by various entities and create a permanent system," said a Japanese official. UNESCO officials said they hoped to "integrate and harmonize" a large number of proposals in March. They stressed that no single entity should dominate the task of creating the system. "A system in the Indian Ocean must be owned by the Indian Ocean nations," said Patricio A. Bernal, assistant director-general and executive secretary of the UNESCO-Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission. "Hopefully, we will be able to take all those initiatives and integrate them in March." UNESCO also said it will open a research facility in Tsukuba, Ibaraki Prefecture, specializing in water-related hazards, such as tsunami, cyclones and floods. Officials indicated the facility could serve as a training center for tsunami experts from the Indian Ocean region.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: The Japan Times

AUTHOR:

DATE: 20 January 2005

\$13 million tsunami warning system proposal presented at U.N. disaster reduction meeting

KOBE -- A UNESCO-backed proposal that calls for the introduction of a \$13 million tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean within one year was presented Wednesday at the U.N.'s World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe. As part of the proposal, which is to be submitted at a high-level meeting Thursday on the recent Indian Ocean tsunamis, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's International Oceanic Commission will present a final plan of action by July at the earliest. If adopted, the technology to detect earthquakes and tsunamis could be in place within a year, although the completion of a

comprehensive early warning communications system for countries would take longer, UNESCO officials said. "The absence of a tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean like the one in the Pacific Ocean was the reason for the extensive damage," said Koichiro Matsuura, director general of UNESCO. "We plan to hold technical meetings in Paris next month, following which much commentary from experts and others will be solicited," said Patricio Bernal, an IOC executive secretary. "In July, the IOC will present the results of its findings for all member nations who want to implement an early-warning system. "Such a technical system could be up and running within a year, at an initial cost of around \$13 million. However, building a soft infrastructure, i.e. educating people, will take a long time and must be ongoing." The new system favored by UNESCO would combine aspects of the technology and information systems used at the International Tsunami Information Center and the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center -- which counts Japan, the United States, Russia, Indonesia and Thailand among its members. These systems enable the centers to detect earthquakes, determine their magnitude, and issue tsunami warnings to the centers' member states in under 30 minutes. "When there is a quake, we can respond with a tsunami warning to our 26 member countries within 30 minutes," said Laura Kong, director of the International Tsunami Information Center. If a earthquake occurs in the Pacific, the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center, based in Hawaii, can react even faster. "Normally, we can determine the location and magnitude of an undersea earthquake 10 to 15 minutes after it occurs. We can then determine the possibility of tsunamis and issue warnings based on where we think they have a chance of striking," said Charles McCreery, director of the Pacific center. But because the exact path of a tsunami cannot be determined until the surface wave direction is known -- which can be several hours after an earthquake -- about 90 percent of the first tsunami warnings turn out to be false alarms, he explained. UNESCO's proposal was not the only one announced Wednesday. S.K. Subramanian, deputy director general of the Indian Meteorological Department, said India planned to have its own Indian Ocean warning system in place by 2007.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: The Japan Times

AUTHOR: Eric Johnston

DATE: 21 January

U.N. eyes lead role in tsunami alert system - First phase to build on Pacific model

KOBE -- The United Nations will take the lead in developing an Indian Ocean tsunami early warning system by drawing on existing systems in the Pacific, U.N. delegates to the World Conference on Disaster Reduction said Thursday. Participants at an international symposium in Kobe watch an earthquake demonstration on the third day of a United Nations conference on disasters. At a special Indian Ocean session held on the third day of the five-day conference, the delegates said proposals for new technologies and systems will be considered later when more permanent measures can be taken. "Until an Indian Ocean tsunami early warning system is established, we have to use the current technological systems," said Yoshitaka Murata, chairman of the conference and Japan's disaster management minister. The system to be used as the model for the Indian Ocean version is being used in the Pacific under the coordination of the United Nations Educational and Scientific Organization's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC). Based in Hawaii, it is used by 26 nations, including the United States and Japan. The Japanese delegation said it would try to play a leading role

through this system. "In response to requests from the Indian Ocean region, Japan is ready to provide tsunami warning information from observational data through existing networks," Vice Foreign Minister Shuzen Tanigawa said. UNESCO officials and delegates said they are confident that, based on this system, the Indian Ocean region can have one up and running within a year, if there is international agreement to act quickly. Patricio Bernal, executive secretary of the IOC, said the initial implementation cost could be as low as \$13 million, although other experts put the total at somewhere between \$30 million and \$50 million. Although the delegates were in relative agreement on their short-term plans, divisions remained over what kind of long-term, comprehensive early warning system would be best. India, Indonesia and Germany have all proposed different technical and logistic systems. Other delegates, including Kenya, have stressed the need for a system that emphasizes earthquakes instead of tsunamis. Then there is the more difficult question of a global tsunami warning system that would link the existing systems together with new ones that would have to be established not only in the Indian Ocean, but in the Caribbean and Mediterranean seas as well. The U.S. is pushing hard for a global system that would be based on the IOC's Pacific system. The IOC is a member of the Group on Earth Observations, an intergovernmental group of 55 nations that aims to eventually create a global system for monitoring the Earth called the Global Observation System of Systems (GEOSS). The U.S. feels the Group of Earth Observations should play a leading role. "The United States believes a global tsunami early warning system should be an expansion of the existing system in the Pacific," U.S. Ambassador to Japan Howard Baker said. "To make sure that expansion happens without delay, the U.S. will propose the development of a global tsunami warning system be a top near-term priority for the Group of Earth Observations when the group meets in Brussels next month." Assessing and prioritizing different early warning systems, including the technological, financial and social issues involved, will be the subject of a U.N. conference in Bonn in early 2006. The question of who would run such a system -- individual countries or multilateral organizations -- was a contentious one prior to the special Indian Ocean session. However, in the draft of a common statement released after the session, the delegates made it clear that any new system should be ultimately responsible to the United Nations. "A tsunami early warning for the Indian Ocean must be tailored to the specific circumstances of the Indian Ocean and the individual requirements of the countries under the coordination of the United Nations," the statement said.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Jiji Press

AUTHOR:

DATE: 22 January 2005

U.N. Conference Adopts Action Plan for Disaster Reduction

KOBE -- A U.N. antidisaster conference was concluded on Saturday with the adoption of an action plan for the next 10 years, including the establishment of warning systems to deal with tsunamis and other natural disasters. The five-day World Conference on Disaster Reduction gained an added urgency in the wake of the tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean last month, which was caused by a huge earthquake off the Indonesian island of Sumatra and killed more than 220,000 people. The gathering was held in Kobe, a western Japan city rebuilt after being flattened by an earthquake in 1995 that killed more than 6,000 people. In the action plan, delegates to the meeting stressed the importance of taking pre-emptive measures to reduce the impact of future disasters, a point underscored by the

catastrophic results caused by the lack of a tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean. The promotion of a "culture of prevention" is "an investment for the future with substantial returns," they said. The action plan called for ensuring that disaster risk reduction is "a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation." It also pointed to the need to "identify, assess and monitor disaster risks" and "enhance early warning." Governments and international organizations should reflect disaster reduction considerations on their development policies and planning, it said. The delegates also issued a "Kobe Declaration," expressing solidarity with the victims of the latest tsunami and other disasters and urging serious efforts for disaster prevention. Despite recognizing an improvement in disaster reduction efforts around the world over the past decade, "we are deeply concerned that communities continue to experience excessive losses of precious human lives ... due to various natural disasters worldwide," they said. Referring to natural disasters' damage to underdeveloped nations in particular, they said reducing disaster risks to enable sustainable development is "one of the most critical challenges facing the international community." After the conclusion of the conference, Jan Egeland, U.N. undersecretary-general for humanitarian affairs and emergency relief coordinator, told a press conference that measures included in the action plan, if implemented properly, could halve the number of people killed by natural disasters over the next decade. Over the past 10 years, 500,000 to 750,000 people perished in natural disasters worldwide, he said.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: The Japan Times

AUTHOR Eric Johnston

DATE: 23 January

TSUNAMIS STEAL MEETING'S THUNDER - On disaster reduction, a missed opportunity

KOBE -- Thanks to intense international political heat, the Indian Ocean region will get a tsunami early warning within three years. But more fundamental issues related to disaster reduction remain on the back burner, resulting in a lost opportunity. Yoshitaka Murata, state minister for disaster management, holds a vote Saturday on the Hyogo Declaration at the U.N. disaster conference in Kobe, while Salvano Briceno, director of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, looks on. That's the view expressed by numerous delegates to the United Nations Conference on Disaster Reduction, which closed Saturday. The five-day conference, having been scheduled since early last year, was originally supposed to be an opportunity to review a comprehensive United Nations strategy for disaster reduction methods called the Yokohama Strategy, which was adopted in 1994. But following the Dec. 26 Indian Ocean tsunamis, which have claimed an estimated 158,000 to 221,000 lives, what had been previously considered a meeting of minor international interest suddenly turned into the focus of global attention. The most pressing issue before the conference was what to do about an early tsunami warning system for the Indian Ocean and when to launch it. And there was quick agreement that the easiest way to get a system in place is to use the basic technological and logistical system currently used in the Pacific Ocean. That system is run by the Intergovernmental Oceanic Commission, which is coordinated by UNESCO. The IOC announced that work on such a system for the Indian Ocean, if formally adopted at a meeting in July, could begin by early next year. The system would be fully operational in two to three years. Japan's pledge to commit \$4 million to an early warning system was greeted with enthusiasm by all members. But more than money and technology, virtually all

participants said Japan's rapid domestic early warning public communications systems and public awareness of earthquakes and tsunamis are the best in the world. Many called on both Japan's national and local governments, and Japanese NGOs, to play an active role in advising both governments and international NGOs on how to implement practical methods of warning people of impending disasters. Yet once the high-profile question of providing the technology and knowhow for an Indian Ocean tsunami warning system in the short-term had been answered, the momentum for quick action on more long-term, complex questions of disaster reduction methods stalled. Jan Egeland, U.N. undersecretary general for humanitarian affairs, and Salvano Briceno, director of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, noted that nontechnological issues require just as much attention as the complex technological issues. The various NGOs in Kobe certainly agreed. Both the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Society and Tearfund, a U.K.-based group, pushed hard for the U.N. to force governments to formulate disaster prevention policies of practical benefit. Their suggestions included the establishment of radio stations to broadcast warnings, education of the local populace on what happens to the beach when a tsunami is approaching, and such low-tech ideas as warning signs or sirens along the beaches. Also on the agenda of not only the NGOs but also many of the delegates were fixed timetables to accomplish goals ranging from the creation of community-based disaster centers to the funding of disaster prevention initiatives. In the end, though, those seeking specific deadlines came away disappointed. "This was an opportunity lost," said one European delegate. What worries many is that, with the conclusion of this conference and numerous others related to disaster prevention scheduled throughout the next couple of months, the international will to take long-term action to push for integrated disaster reduction policies, which not only give wealthy tourists on the beaches of Phuket ample warning of a tsunami but also ordinary fisherman in remote villages, will be lost. Just after the tsunami, there had been hopes among participants that U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan would personally attend or that Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi would use the Jakarta summit earlier this month to call for a top-level session at the conference, perhaps even at the foreign minister-level, to deal not only with the short-term problems of the Indian Ocean but also the longer term issues. "We had a golden opportunity here, and it could well be gone in a few months, when the world's attention, which means the attention of political leaders as well, becomes diverted by some new crises," said Marcus Oxley, disaster management director of Tearfund. A contentious issue at the conference was whether -- and how often -- to include references to climate change as a cause for natural disasters. The United States, which opposes the Kyoto Protocol on global warming and rejects much of the scientific evidence that links greenhouse gases to climate change, fought to limit the number of references in the final Hyogo framework adopted by the convention. In the end, there was one reference to climate change and no reference to the role of greenhouse gases on climate, a clause desired by many NGOs and European governments.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Daily Yomiuri

AUTHOR: Hiroko Ihara

DATE: 23 January 2005

U.N. disaster conference gets mixed reviews

KOBE --The U.N. World Conference on Disaster Reduction that ended Saturday provided many opportunities to discuss disaster management, but while the event

was praised by some participants, some nongovernmental organization members criticized the Hyogo Declaration and the Hyogo Framework for action 2005-2015 as too vague. Due to the worldwide attention following the catastrophic events of Dec. 26, the conference attracted 40,000 people, four times more than expected, the organizing committee said. In addition to creating a tsunami-warning system, the forum also encouraged building partnerships among international organizations, central and local governments, the private sector and citizens, such as volunteers, as means to promote disaster reduction and mitigation efforts. Patricio Bernal, assistant director general of UNESCO and executive secretary of its Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), which has operated the tsunami-warning system in the Pacific Ocean for 40 years, said not many people knew about the system before the recent tsunami. But, he added, the conference had increased awareness of the danger of tsunami and the importance of early warning systems. "The conference provided a unique opportunity to assess the immediate reaction to future plans in relation to the catastrophic tsunami in the Indian Ocean," Bernal said. "One of the major accomplishments for us is that a strong recommendation came out of the special session on tsunami asking the IOC to take the lead in building the tsunami warning system for the ocean." Bernal added the conference was valuable for fostering the development of contacts among organizations and groups active in disaster reduction. Terry Jeggler, a senior officer of U.N. International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, spoke of the significance of a reconstruction support group his organization was establishing in Kobe with the U.N. Development Program and several other organizations, saying Kobe was a fitting location for such organizations as it had accumulated knowledge and expertise in restoration following the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake. While conference officials concluded that the event was a success, Thea Hilhorst, professor of disaster studies at Wageningen University in the Netherlands, said at a press conference given on behalf of the 161 participating NGOs after the closing session that she was very disappointed as the declaration and framework lacked practical ideas.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Daily Yomiuri

AUTHOR:

DATE: 23 January 2005

Natural disasters are a threat common to all mankind EDITORIAL

TOKYO -- The 2nd U.N. World Conference on Disaster Reduction, held last week in Kobe and participated in by delegates from 168 countries and international organizations, adopted a ten-year international framework for action to reduce the effects of natural hazards. In response to the unprecedented natural calamity caused by a tsunami in the Indian Ocean last month, the adoption of the international framework is a declaration of the resolution of the international community to enhance its ability to reduce the damage caused by natural disasters. Regarding tsunami-related measures, the conference's focal issue, the participants agreed to support a U.N.-led effort to establish a tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean. The participants also agreed to aim at introducing a similar system to cover other coastal areas in the Mediterranean, Caribbean and Atlantic. Also proposed was the idea of establishing a global warning system against other natural disasters, storms, floods and droughts. There are many issues in dealing with tsunami alone. For instance, it took eight years to start operating the International Tsunami Information Center, which was established in Honolulu, Hawaii, following a tsunami disaster triggered by a major earthquake in Chile in 1960. There are not enough

tsunami experts in countries around the Indian Ocean. Systems to detect oncoming tsunami, to issue warnings and to disseminate relevant information to affected communities need to be established from scratch. It is also essential to educate people on what a tsunami really means. Using Japan's observation network, the government plans to offer tsunami information to coastal countries in the Indian Ocean as a provisional measure until the tsunami warning system is fully operational.

Share experience - The word tsunami comes from the Japanese language. By making use of its experience and knowhow concerning tsunami, Japan should be able to make a wide range of contributions by helping countries build their disaster-management organizations, offering technical assistance and helping them organize personnel. The main pillars of the disaster reduction action plan consist of establishing a warning system, reinforcing social infrastructure and promoting disaster-related education. These are the very basics of disaster-preparedness efforts, but putting such measures into effect is easier said than done. So far, international disaster management efforts have mainly consisted of emergency relief activities following disasters.

U.N. Undersecretary General for Humanitarian Affairs Jan Egeland proposed during the conference to spend more than 10 percent of relief expenses on disaster prevention. It is desirable for every country to understand that being prepared for disasters reduces loss of life and damage to property and other social assets. The strategy on disaster reduction adopted in the first conference in 1994 in Yokohama was very much a declaration. However the strategy was not accompanied by an effective implementation plan and progress in improving disaster management systems differed among countries.

U.N. must take lead - From now on, it is necessary for U.N. organizations specializing in this area to take the lead in checking how quickly the action plan of each country is being implemented and in helping them steadily improve their disaster reduction systems. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi presented a policy of actively utilizing official development assistance in lessening disaster-related losses. Continuous support is needed, starting from such development and post-disaster reconstruction measures as the establishment of criteria for earthquake-proof buildings and improvement of seawalls to efforts to prepare for the next natural catastrophe. Among developing countries, there are some who have claimed to be utterly dependent on assistance and funds from developed countries. Yet it is the affected country that is primarily responsible for reducing disaster losses. The fundamentals of such assistance lie in prompting countries to help themselves. Every year, 250 million people fall victim to natural disasters around the world. Climate change and environmentally destructive development have made the earth more fragile. The international community cannot afford to delay in the battle against natural disasters.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Daily Yomiuri

AUTHOR:

DATE: 24 January 2005

Anti-disaster plan adopted

KOBE -- Participating nations at the U.N. World Conference on Disaster Reduction unanimously adopted Saturday the Hyogo Declaration and the Hyogo Framework for action: 2005-2015, confirming that disaster prevention is an urgent issue that the international community must tackle. The documents, however, failed to include any numerical targets for disaster-reduction efforts or strong commitments from developed nations to provide financial assistance to developing nations. Jan Egeland, U.N. undersecretary general for humanitarian affairs, said in his remarks at

the final plenary meeting, "The decisions of this conference are not legally-binding documents, but carry a strong moral commitment by states and organizations to guide our policies and actions in the coming 10 years." The conference, which ended Saturday and was attended by delegates from more than 150 nations and concerned international organizations, was held to discuss the actions to be taken by nations and others involved to reduce the risk of disasters and damage caused by disasters in the coming decade. In the Hyogo declaration, participating nations offered condolences to all disaster victims, especially those killed or affected by the recent tsunami in the Indian Ocean. The declaration says, "Disasters seriously undermine the results of development investments in a very short time and remain a major impediment to sustainable development and poverty eradication." While states are regarded as primarily responsible for protecting their people and property from disasters, the declaration encourages all stakeholders, from individuals to states, to get involved in disaster reduction efforts. According to the declaration, there is an urgent need to enhance the disaster-prevention capacity of developing nations through strengthened national efforts and enhanced bilateral, regional and international cooperation. As a guiding framework on disaster reduction for the next 10 years, the Hyogo Framework for action contains the expected outcomes, strategic goals and priorities for actions, as well as implementation strategies and associated follow-ups. The framework states that concerned parties should work to substantially reduce the loss of lives, as well as damage to social, economic and environmental assets of communities and countries caused by disasters. Although the framework sets no numerical targets, Egeland said at a press conference after the plenary session that he personally believed it would be possible to halve the loss of life from disasters during the next decade if the actions in the document were implemented. To that end, the document addresses three strategic goals, including the more effective integration of disaster risk considerations into sustainable development policies at all levels. It also outlined five priorities for action, such as making disaster risk reduction a national and local priority, and using knowledge and education to promote safety and resilience at all levels. Under the five priorities for actions, various key activities for all relevant parties are mentioned. They include the development of early warning systems and the promotion of programs and activities in schools for learning how to minimize hazardous effects. The framework also describes the roles and responsibilities of governments and regional and international organizations. It confirms that each state has the primary responsibility for the economic and social development necessary for disaster reduction. The document states that the appropriate resources and capabilities of relevant national, regional and international bodies, including the United Nations, should be mobilized.

END ITEM

ASIA AND PACIFIC MEDIA

MEDIUM: Papua New Guinea Post

AUTHOR:

DATE: 18 January 2005

Disaster summit - Sir Peter attends conference in Kobe, Japan

Inter-Government Relations Minister Sir Peter Barter is currently attending the world conference on disaster reduction underway in Kobe, Japan. Sir Peter was accompanied by National Disaster and Emergency Services director Eric Ani. The conference is being attended by government representatives from the United Nations' member states. Objectives of the conference is to set clear directions and priorities for action at the international, regional and local levels to ensure implementation of the international strategy for disaster reduction. These include a review of the Yokohama strategy and its plan of action, updating the guiding framework on disaster reduction for the 21st century. The Yokohama strategy is a document that sets a plan of action for a 10-year period, providing guiding principles for disaster prevention, preparedness and mitigation. The conference will also identify specific activities aimed at ensuring the implementation of relevant provisions of the Johannesburg plan of implementation of the "world summit on sustainable development on vulnerability, risk assessment and disaster management". It aims at increasing awareness on the importance of disaster reduction policies, thereby facilitating and promoting the implementation of those policies and to increase the reliability and availability of appropriate disaster related information to the public and disaster management agencies in all regions, as set out in relevant provisions of the Johannesburg plan of implementation. Sir Peter said Papua New Guinea has its share of natural disasters and continues to benefit from its membership to regional organisations that form part of this world conference on disaster reduction at which sessions have been set aside to discuss regional issues.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Xinhua

AUTHOR:

DATE: 18 January

World disaster reduction conference kicks off in Kobe

KOBE -- The United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction kicked off Tuesday here with the recent Indian Ocean tsunami disaster standing as a hot item at the meeting. The conference observed a moment of silence for the victims of Indian Ocean tsunami. At the five-day conference, more than 4,000 participants are expected to work out a program of action for the next 10 years, containing strategic goals and priorities, to realize the substantial reduction of disaster losses in lives and in the social, economic and environmental assets of communities and countries. A Conference Declaration will be adopted at the meeting. The conference will hold two extra sessions to review the sweeping catastrophe that has killed more than 160,000 people in nations ranging from Asia to Africa. At Thursday's special session, senior government officials from tsunami-stricken countries and other UN members will discuss issues related to early warning system, preparedness and coastal recovery

and other options which can be applied regionally and globally. It will be preceded by a technical session on the promotion of tsunami mitigation in the Indian Ocean. In a video broadcast on the scene, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said, "Rarely has a tragedy made a conference so topical and timely as this one," referring to the tsunami disaster in Asia. "We must draw and act on every lesson we can, and prevent such tragedies occurring in the future," he said. Addressing the opening ceremony, Jan Egeland, UN under-secretary general for Humanitarian Affairs, said, "The best way we can honor the dead is to protect the living. We must meet today to take on this challenge with renewed urgency and vigor, knowing that we must translate words into deeds, and good intentions into concrete action." The poor were particularly vulnerable, for the lack of resources to withstand and recover from natural disasters, he said. He also urged to put more money in disaster reduction, saying that "it is not an additional expense, but an essential investment." "The benefit of the cost will be calculated not only in dollars or euros or yen, but most importantly in lives in every corner of the global," he said. After the conference ends on Saturday, an ad hoc meeting will be held to review and coordinate plans and activities on developing tsunami early warning systems, particularly for the next 12 months in the Indian Ocean region. Experts put the cost for an early warning system at about 20 million US dollars, saying that it could be in place in less than a year if there is a smooth international cooperation. The previous such a meeting was held in May 1994 in Yokohama, Japan. At that time, the participants adopted the "Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World", a guideline document which highlighted the importance of disaster prevention and preparedness as well as the early warnings of disasters. The conference coincided with the 10th anniversary of the Hanshin earthquake in Kobe and surrounding areas. More than 6,400 people perished in the tremor. Japan's Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko attended the ceremony. And Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi is scheduled to deliver the host country statement in the afternoon. Since 1994, 478,100 people across the world have been killed in natural and technological disasters, with more than 2.5 billion people affected, according to the document issued at the conference. The economic losses were about 690 billion dollars. In terms of regions, Asia continued to be the most affected continent, accounting for more than half of the casualties and over 90 percent of the affected people. Among all disasters, floods and earthquakes were the deadliest natural hazards during the decade, liable for 50 percent of the total casualties.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Xinhua

AUTHOR:

DATE: 18 January

UN calls for early warning systems, more investment in prevention

KOBE -- The world needs early warning systems not particularly in dealing with tsunami, but also against more frequent disasters, said a senior United Nations official on Tuesday when attending the world disaster reduction meeting here. At a press conference, Jan Egeland, UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, predicted that over the next 10 years, all disaster-prone nations would have early warning systems. But that kind of systems "should not be primarily for tsunamis, because tsunamis come very infrequently," he said. Egeland pointed out that surveillance systems against more frequent disasters, such as hurricane and drought, should also be established across the world. He asked for more donors and more generous donations, saying the rich world is giving too little assistance. Earlier, when addressing the opening ceremony, he urged that the conference not only adopt

the proposed framework of action, but also with an accelerated timeline and clear indicators for building disaster-resilience at the local and at the global level. Egeland proposed that in the next 10 years to come, a minimum of 10 percent of the billions of now spent on disaster relief by all nations should be earmarked for disaster risk reduction. The World Conference on Disaster Reduction is expected to adopt a program outcome document and the Conference Declaration when it concludes on Saturday, providing guidelines for the next 10 years.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Xinhua

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January

China calls for regional group for disaster reduction

BEIJING -- China has proposed the establishment of a regional mechanism to monitor, prevent, and evaluate the outcome of severe natural disasters. The head of the Chinese delegation at the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Li Xueju made the suggestion. He also said China is willing to have closer cooperation with other countries and continue discussions on natural disasters. He discussed the Chinese government's role in providing emergency assistance, money and rescue and medical teams to the tsunami-ravaged countries. The World Conference on Disaster Reduction opened in Kobe Tuesday, focusing on a global strategy on risk reduction and disaster management. The conference will finish on January 22.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Xinhua

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January

UNEP warns of environmental impact by tsunami

KOBE -- The head of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) said Wednesday that the recent Indian Ocean tsunami could have serious impact on the environment of the countries affected. Although it was too early to make a detailed assessment, early indications from the UNEP's work on the tsunami were that the direct damage to the environment, including water supplies, forests and other natural resources will likely be high in many of the countries affected, said Klaus Toepfer, executive director of the UNEP. "Beyond the immediate concerns of threat to human health and livelihoods, there is increasing evidence of serious impacts on the natural environment, such as damage to coral reefs and protective forest in a number of countries," he said at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction which started here Tuesday. He stressed the importance of the environment in disaster reduction. "Without the environmental dimension firmly in the equation, there will be no long term disaster risk reduction," he said. To highlight the role played by sound environment protection in reducing damages by natural disasters, he said the Hurricane Jeanne last year killed up to 3,000 people in Haiti, because deforestation made flood rush down unchecked from hills, while the neighboring Dominican Republic saw few casualties partly thanks to good protection of forest. Toepfer called for increasing investment in environmental protection and putting a disaster prevention value on the natural ecosystems. More than 4,000 participants from about

150 countries and organizations are attending the five-day to map out a disaster reduction guideline for the decade to come.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Xinhua

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January

IEWP launched at disaster reduction meeting

KOBE -- A global early warning system against natural disasters was set up Wednesday at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction held here. The International Early Warning Program (IEWP) was established to improve resilience to all types of natural hazards including droughts, floods, typhoons, hurricanes, landslides, tsunamis, volcanic eruption and wildland fires. The system involves a string of major United Nations organizations, like the World Meteorological Organization, the United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organization. A special session was also convened on the day at the conference to discuss the establishment of an early warning system in the Indian Ocean region, likely by June next year. The conference became so topical in the aftermath of the devastating tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean on Dec. 26 which has killed more than 160,000 people. The IEWP will include wider information flow and emphasize the importance of community education about disaster preparedness. "This new program will help bring safety, security and peace of mind. Millions of people worldwide owe their lives and livelihoods to effective early warnings systems," said Salvano Briceno, director of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. About 478,000 people were killed in natural and technological disasters over the past 10 years, with more than 2.5 billion affected, according to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The five-day conference ends on Saturday and is expected to adopt an Framework for Action for the next 10 years on disaster reduction.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Xinhua (Chinese News Agency)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January 2005

Challenges confront proposed Indian Ocean tsunami warning system

KOBE -- As the United Nations is on an active move toward building an early tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean as well as a global network, a lot of challenges remain to be addressed, officials and experts said Wednesday at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction. An extra session on the establishment of the system was held on the day, with another one scheduled for Thursday. One of the imperative issues is to establish an international coordination function in a bid to have coherent views between the entities concerned, said the report issued after the session. Since the Indian Ocean tsunami, many countries and international bodies, like the United States, Japan, Germany, Australia and the United Nations, have made proposals on dealing with tsunami disasters. The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) is to convene in early March in Paris a technical meeting of experts from the interested member countries and relevant regional and international organizations. The meeting will seek to harmonize the different early warning initiatives emerging for the Indian Ocean and define the scope and

characteristics of a global tsunami warning system. "We are taking a lead (in establishing the system)," said Patricio A. Bernal, executive secretary of the IOC. A detailed plan and framework decided at the meeting concerning the establishment of the system would be put forward to relevant governments for sanctions. The IOC assembly could give birth to the system in this July if things go well, according to Bernal. Smooth cooperation between the international, national and regional is also needed in the efforts. A warning of tsunami issued by an international organization needs to be disseminated quickly and accurately all the way down to the population of the countries or regions in danger. Likewise, the gathering and sharing of information needs collective efforts from different nations as well as different regions in a nation. "It must be an international program, but with national participation," said Bernal. Experts also agreed that efforts should be made to push up the public awareness of and the preparedness for tsunami. "When you do have a warning system working, you do have to have the awareness and preparedness in place, because if you do issue a warning without the awareness and the preparedness in place, you will get no reaction, or you may even worsen the reaction of the population," Bernal said. Even if the Indian Ocean region finally has a early warning system in place, the long-term sustainability is also to be a concern. Because the tsunami occurs rarely in some areas, and efforts should be made to persuade decision makers to sustain a system for decades. To realize a sustainable tsunami early warning system, the idea is to make it more integrated with other ocean-related hazard warning systems, said Peter Pissierssens, head of the Ocean Services IOC. Unlike the situation in the Pacific Ocean region where countries with strong economic power, like the United States, Japan and Australia, stood as solid funding sources, the Indian Ocean rim countries are mostly developing countries. They may lose interest in or can not afford to keep a warning system running in the long run. To deploy it requires about 13 million US dollars, while the operational cost stands at about 4 million to 5 million dollars a year, according to Peter Schindele, an expert working with the Pacific tsunami alert system. In a few month ahead, the interest in the tsunami may fade away. So it is important to ensure to build a solid foundation now first of all with Indian Ocean nations, said Peter Pissierssens. "We need to empower the countries. We need to convince them that this is something very important. We need to link it other hazards. So they build solid national early warning systems for tsunamis and for other hazards," the head of the Ocean Services IOC said. Experts said there is no technical obstacles to set up such a system in the Indian Ocean as equipment and technology employed in the Pacific Ocean's system, which have had been developed for 40 years, can also make contribution in the Indian Ocean. All that technology used in the Pacific Ocean, like seismic and sea level observation systems, is "entirely transferable" to the other part of the world, including in the Indian Ocean, said Laura Kong, director of the International Tsunami Information Center. A global tsunami alert system was also eyed at the session. Experts hope to have it come into play by June 2007.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Chosun Ilbo (Republic of Korea)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January

NOAA Developing an Early-Warning System for Disaster Reduction

Officials from around the world are preparing to meet at a United Nations conference on disaster reduction in Kobe, Japan (January 18-22). At the top on the agenda is how to develop early-warning systems in countries hit by the recent tsunami.

Participants will also discuss how to protect poor communities who are most vulnerable to disasters. Leta Hong Fincher has this report. Following the tsunami that killed more than 165,000 people, the international community is calling for a warning system for the Indian Ocean -- similar to one in the Pacific, which has had these tsunami buoys for years. The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA, in Washington D.C. says this global early-warning network would be even better. The director of NOAA, Conrad Lautenbacher, says the proposed Earth Observation System will involve more than 50 countries in monitoring changes in the oceans and atmosphere. He says the system could provide warning signals within 15 minutes of the start of a tsunami or other disaster. "Today there are tens of thousands of sensors," says Mr. Lautenbacher, "Some of which are networked together and we get valuable information from, and many of which are slave to individual systems that don't report and talk to each other. The idea of a global system would be to connect all of these systems together and get information to people as quickly as they need it." Mr. Lautenbacher says part of the system should be tide gauges that monitor waves to speed up warnings of potential disasters. "A tide gauge is a technologically very simple device, it doesn't cost very much, but the United States and developed countries have no capability of getting tide gauge measurements from other parts of the world, unless those countries themselves install the gauges and agree to exchange the data." Another crucial part of a warning network, says Mr. Lautenbacher, is a comprehensive agreement to share data. He says that a big problem today is the lack of communication among scientists and officials in different countries. Mr. Lautenbacher says the Earth Observation System would help spread scientific information quickly around the world. "We would have a data-sharing arrangement that would allow for rapid dissemination of data coming from systems that developed nations have already put in place. That information could be used directly in internal warning systems in nations throughout the world to warn of almost any type of natural or man-made disaster." But sophisticated monitoring is not enough to prevent catastrophes. Development experts say poor countries suffer disproportionately from disasters. An estimated two million people are at risk of sinking deeper into poverty as a result of the Asian tsunami. James Wolfensohn, president of the World Bank in Washington D.C., says that aid to tsunami-affected areas should help make the poor more secure and less vulnerable to future disasters. He told us, "Our experience is uniformly this, that in the emergencies, particularly these physical and natural disasters, it is the poor that are the most unprotected and generally in the most vulnerable areas." Mr. Wolfensohn recently toured tsunami-hit areas in Indonesia, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. He says that poor fishermen were among those most hurt by the tsunami because they live on beaches that are exposed to the tides. "So these people are just devastated, and the towns that are supporting them are typically not very rich towns, they're fishing towns and they too lack concrete structures or structures that are able to stand up to the physical force of a natural disaster." Rich countries, on the other hand, tend to have building codes, public awareness and land-use policies that protect people from natural hazards. Scientists and aid agencies agree that the technology exists to reduce the effects of natural disasters in all countries. What is needed, they say, is more international collaboration.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Xinhua

AUTHOR:

DATE: 20 January

Role of UN highlighted in building tsunami warning system

KOBE -- Participants of the World Conference of Disaster Reduction agreed Thursday that the United Nations will be responsible for coordinating the implementation of a tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean. "The consensus has been that this is a process to be led by the United Nations. Within the United Nations, the various agencies represent various stages of the process," Salvano Briceno, director of the United Nations Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, said at the press conference after a two-day extra session on the Indian Ocean tsunami issue. He, then, revised the wording, saying "our capacity is just to facilitate the process. So I wouldn't here to say lead. We are just facilitating the leadership by each of the institutions that need to lead a specific area." A draft statement about the extra session reads "a tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean must be tailored to the specific circumstances of the Indian Ocean and the individual requirements of countries, under the coordination of the United Nations, and that those countries must be the ones to determine the shape and nature of the system." The sweeping tsunami on Dec. 26 last year made the building of an alert system in the Indian Ocean a prominent issue at the conference. The draft statement also emphasizes "the importance of continued international and regional dialogue and discussion in order to build understanding, solidarity and commitment to improve early warning systems and to reduce disasters." He said the final document is expected to be issued later the day or early Friday. Experts said a unified organization plays a more important role than technology in an early implementation. A lot of countries have offered proposals on the establishment of the proposal, raising concerns that the process could lack a united effort. Technology and equipment employed on the system watching the Pacific Ocean can be transferred to the proposed new system. The initial cost is put from 13 million US dollars to above 20 million dollars, with 4 million to 5 million dollars every year required to keep it running, experts said. A series of international and regional meetings on the issue are scheduled to push for the establishment of the Indian Ocean system. "We have started a valuable team effort in supporting this system," said Briceno.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Xinhua

AUTHOR:

DATE: 21 January

Disaster reduction meeting calls for safer hospitals, schools

KOBE -- The World Conference on Disaster Reduction Friday called to make hospitals and schools free of disaster impact by 2015. "When hospitals are destroyed, it is impossible to care for the wounded; when schools are damaged, our future generation is at risk," said Salvano Briceno, director of the Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, adding that "Hospitals and schools need to be multi-hazard resistant to avoid double disaster from occurring." Jean-Luc Poncelet of the Pan American Health Organization cited that all the main hospitals were damaged when an earthquake hit the Bam city of Iran in 2003 and were not able to provide basic social services. Thousands of school children were among the 220,000 victims of the Indian Ocean tsunami on Dec. 26, and thousands more have perished in floods, earthquakes and hurricanes. The target is expected to be incorporated in the outcome document Saturday when the five-day conference ends here.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: The Australian

AUTHOR: Peter Alford

DATE: 21 January

UN backs Australian plan for ocean warning system

TOKYO -- THE Australian approach to building an Indian Ocean tsunami warning system has won endorsement from the UN's Kobe conference on disaster reduction. The Australian model emphasises building on Indian Ocean nations' existing capabilities and linking them in a regional tsunami risk analysis and early warning system. "Australia is happy there is a strong emphasis on regional ownership (of the system) that builds on national capabilities," said Geoff Love, head of the Australian Bureau of Meteorology and a member of the national delegation. Alternatives to that approach have included an advanced technology-based system proposed by Germany, and building the Indian Ocean system to operate within a global environmental "system of systems" pushed by the US. Regional rivals Japan and China have each proposed different approaches which they would lead and further their general influence in the Asian neighbourhood. Those countries and Australia are the core group of national donors to the Indian Ocean tsunami-warning project. They will have a major influence in determining its final shape when an international scientific committee sits down in Paris in March to begin the nuts-and-bolts planning and specifications. The Australian approach won an important endorsement yesterday when the chairman's text from a special session of the Kobe conference yesterday emphasized regional co-operation and building on Indian Ocean nations' existing systems. The text was issued in the name of Japan's Minister for Disaster Management, Yoshitaka Murata, who chaired the session, and is likely to be adopted into the final conference statement on Saturday. It has been agreed that the US and Japan will take interim responsibility for tsunami warnings in the Indian Ocean while the new system is built, which will take 12 to 18 months.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Papua New Guinea Post

AUTHOR:

DATE: 21 January

Global warning plan

KOBE -- The United Nations announced yesterday it would set up a global system to predict disasters, but differences remained on whose technology would be used amid a rush of offers after Asia's tsunami tragedy. UN agencies in a joint statement at a global conference in Kobe, Japan said the world body's experts would create a system to reduce the risk of disasters amid outrage that Indian Ocean nations had no warning when their coasts were battered last month. "The new program will bring safety, security and peace of mind. "Millions of people worldwide owe their lives and livelihood to effective early warning systems," said Salvano Briceno, director of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. But the announcement was largely symbolic, with an official at the UN science agency UNESCO, which is spearheading the warning system project, acknowledging that more focused talks were needed. "Right now we have several proposals which are completely unco-ordinated by different countries. What we need to do is co-ordinate them," said Patricio Bernal,

head of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission. He said his group would hold two meetings within 60 days, with one in Paris in March and the other yet to be organised, in hopes of picking a tsunami system with which to move forward. Bernal hoped a decision could be finalised at a meeting of his commission in July so work could begin and the system could be running by mid-2006, the target date set by UNESCO. Bernal, asked whether all nations would agree to work together on the tsunami warning system, said, "At a technical level, yes."

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Xinhua

AUTHOR:

DATE: 22 January

Disaster reduction meeting ends with decade guiding plan

KOBE -- The World Conference on Disaster Reduction ended Saturday here with the adoption of a declaration and a framework of action, mapping out the disaster reduction undertaking for the next 10 years. Earlier, the participants also agreed on a document on promoting the building of an tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean rim after a two-day extra session. "We have achieved a good framework for action which represents a substantive set of objectives to ensure that the world reduces risk and vulnerabilities to natural hazards in the next ten years," Jan Egeland, United Nations under-secretary general for humanitarian affairs, said at the closing session. He described the framework as a "concrete document" and "a basis for a lot of concrete work" in the coming decade. The United Nations aims to cut by half the casualties in disasters in the following 10 years compared with those suffered in the past decade, Egeland said. More than 4,000 participants from over 160 nations and organizations gathered to find a way to reduce life and property losses from natural and technological disasters which have left more than 478,000 people killed and inflicted about 690 billion USdollars in economic losses in the past decade. The objective also includes making all of the states present here having platform for disaster risk reduction in the 10-year period. So far, 50 countries have such action programs, Egeland said. "In the plan of action, a lot of concrete things should happen to make schools and hospitals safe, water sources safe and electricity sources safe," he said. The framework aims to realize in the next 10 years "the substantial reduction of disaster losses, in lives and in the social, economic and environmental assets of communities and countries." The framework also set five aspects as priorities: To ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation; to identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning; to use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels; to reduce the underlying riskfactors; and to strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels. Egeland called on the governments to earmark a minimum of 10 percent of the billions of dollars now spent on disaster relief for risk reduction in the next 10 years. Experts estimates that a one-dollar investment in risk reduction can save about seven dollars for disaster relief. The Indian Ocean tsunami that has killed more than 220,000 people in Asia and Africa was a prominent topic during the meeting. Egeland said the United Nations has had 759 million dollars confirmed by disaster relief donors, among whom Japan is the biggest with 229 million dollars. The participants agreed that the United Nations will be responsible for facilitating the process of establishing an Indian Ocean tsunami watch system. A series of international and regional meetings on the project are expected to be held in the coming months. Experts and officials said here that the system could be ready as soon as within a year. The

proposed Indian Ocean tsunami alert system is expected to cost up to 30 million dollars. A lot of technology and instrument used in such a system currently serving for the Pacific Ocean nations will be applicable to the Indian Ocean system. The initial phase of 9-12 months has received 8-million-dollar pledge from Japan, Sweden, Germany and the European Commission. And the second phase is expected to last for two to three years with efforts mainly engaged in national and local capacity building, said Salvano Briceno, director of International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. At the conference, a global early warning system for all kinds of disaster was launched. "I hope and believe that the Indian Ocean will be a laboratory for change that can be duplicated to early warning systems or platforms for all disaster-prone areas," Egeland said. There were voices complaining of a lack of concrete targets in framework. "The four-day conference ... resulted in a watered-down document that fails to include firm commitments to protect millions of people from future disasters," the Tearfund said in a statement. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies said it will continue to advocate for clear political commitment on specific issues, such as firm targets and indicators, when the next stages of decision-making take place. "Our task now is to work with partners to find ways to transform the encouraging statements made by governments in their plenary statements into the concrete action which has been demanded but not yet framed," Tadateru Kono, leader of the federation's delegation said at the closing session. The United Nations said it will develop specific indicators for the plan of action in order to watch the status of the implementation and hold nations accountable "it's important to understand that we are in the middle of a process, a process that a conference does not solve all the problems or provide all the solutions," he said, adding that it takes several months to develop specific targets and indicators.

END ITEM

FRENCH LANGUAGE

MEDIUM: Le Monde

AUTHOR: Herve Kempf

DATE: 17 January

Les pays pauvres sont les plus vulnérables face aux catastrophes

Sous l'égide de l'ONU, un congrès mondial sur les calamités naturelles réunit à partir de mardi à Kobé, au Japon, plusieurs milliers d'experts. Chaque année, 225 millions de personnes sont touchées par les désastres, le tribut le plus lourd étant payé par l'Afrique et l'Asie. Alors que l'opinion mondiale est encore sous le choc du tsunami du 26 décembre 2004, des milliers d'experts des catastrophes d'origine naturelle se réunissent à Kobé, au Japon, à partir du 18 janvier, sous l'égide des Nations unies. Quarante ministres sont attendus à cette conférence mondiale sur la réduction des désastres, dix ans jour pour jour après le séisme de Kobé (6 433 morts). Un des principaux objectifs de la rencontre est de s'accorder sur la mise en œuvre d'un système d'alerte aux tsunamis dans l'océan Indien. Mais elle permettra surtout de synthétiser des réflexions engagées depuis dix ans autour des catastrophes d'origine naturelle, reconnues comme un problème majeur. Collectés par le Centre de recherche sur l'épidémiologie des désastres (CRED), à Louvain, en Belgique, les chiffres sont sans appel. Chaque année, entre 1994 et 2003, 255 millions de personnes ont été touchées par les catastrophes d'origine naturelle, et 58 000 en sont décédées. Depuis 1974, on a recensé plus de 6 300 désastres, hors épidémies, qui ont frappé 5 milliards d'humains et en ont tué 2 millions. Le changement climatique pourrait, de surcroît, provoquer dans l'avenir une augmentation des inondations et des cyclones. Dans l'échelle des risques, les calamités naturelles ont aujourd'hui détrôné les catastrophes technologiques. Leur coût, très grand, est difficile à mesurer, faute de méthode uniforme. Les pertes couvertes par les assurances donnent un premier indice. En 2004, elles avaient atteint 40 milliards de dollars, avant le tsunami, selon la compagnie de réassurance Munich Re. Mais si le nombre de calamités augmente, le nombre de victimes baisse, car l'efficacité des sauvetages d'urgence s'est améliorée. De même, les systèmes de réaction, qui se mettent progressivement en place, limitent les dommages. Les pays pauvres paient un tribut très lourd aux désastres. Depuis trente ans, selon le CRED, 88 % des tués et 96 % des personnes touchées vivaient en Asie et en Afrique. Même si le patrimoine détruit dans les pays pauvres a une plus faible valeur marchande que dans les pays riches, les dégâts représentent souvent un fort pourcentage du produit intérieur brut (PIB). Ainsi le séisme de Kobé, le plus coûteux enregistré avec 160 milliards de dollars, n'a amputé que de 3 % le PIB du Japon, tandis que l'ouragan Mitch, en 1998, a coûté 2 milliards de dollars au Honduras, soit 42 % de son PIB.

"VULNÉRABILITÉ ET CALAMITÉ" - Les catastrophes d'origine naturelle sont désormais reconnues comme un obstacle au développement. Mais les calamités naturelles ne se transforment en catastrophes que par manque de préparation. "Depuis la conférence de Yokohama en 1994, la réflexion a évolué ; les catastrophes sont maintenant considérées comme des phénomènes sociaux et non pas naturels", explique Philippe Masure, du Bureau de recherches géologiques et minières. "On estime qu'elles sont liées à la pauvreté, à la dureté de la compétition internationale et à la dégradation de l'environnement", ajoute-t-il. David Hargitt, du CRED, poursuit : "Ce qui fait la catastrophe, c'est la combinaison de la vulnérabilité et de la calamité. Il y a beaucoup de calamités naturelles aux Etats-Unis, mais moins de morts qu'en Afrique, parce que la société y est beaucoup mieux préparée." La vulnérabilité est

liée à plusieurs facteurs. La pauvreté conduit des populations misérables à s'installer sur les terrains les plus exposés. Par exemple, à Guatemala City ou à Mexico, les bidonvilles se sont implantés sur des endroits très instables en cas de séisme. Par ailleurs, la dégradation écologique renforce la vulnérabilité des terrains. Ainsi, les inondations du Yangtze en Chine, en 1998, ont été particulièrement dévastatrices parce que 85 % du couvert forestier de son bassin versant avaient été détruits au cours des décennies précédentes. Enfin, le manque de précautions, lié tant au manque d'argent qu'à la faiblesse de l'Etat, est terriblement meurtrier. Le 26 décembre 2003, le tremblement de terre de Bam (Iran) a fait 27 000 morts, enfouis sous les ruines de leurs maisons, tandis que le séisme de même magnitude qui avait frappé la ville de San Simeon (Californie) quatre jours plus tôt n'avait tué que deux personnes. La différence découle essentiellement du mode de construction des maisons. La bonne nouvelle que proclament les experts, c'est que la prévention des catastrophes est relativement peu coûteuse. "Pendant la guerre du Vietnam, 80 % des mangroves - forêts littorales - ont été détruites par les herbicides répandus par les Etats-Unis pour chasser les soldats qui s'y cachaient, dit Marshall Silver, du Programme des Nations unies pour le développement (PNUD), à Hanoï. Les mangroves sont un moyen très efficace de casser l'énergie des vagues pendant les typhons. Depuis les années 1990, plus de 500 km de mangroves ont été replantés, ce qui permet au pays d'absorber les cyclones qu'il encaisse." Le bilan économique est positif. "On estime que 1 dollar investi en prévention économise 3 dollars de dommages", dit M. Silver. Il reste à orienter les investissements économiques vers ce type d'actions. Mais, comme le note le CRED, "l'aide d'urgence est plus visible par les médias et plus facile à quantifier". Ainsi, alors que l'aide au développement stagne ou diminue, l'assistance humanitaire et les opérations des ONG ne cesse d'augmenter. La gestion des désastres d'origine naturelle renvoie en fait à des politiques plus cohérentes et moins émotionnelles, mais sans doute moins faciles à populariser auprès des opinions des pays donateurs.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Swiss Info (French Service)

AUTHOR: Anna Nelson

DATE: 17 January

Un sommet pour contrer les fureurs de la nature

Comment prévenir les catastrophes naturelles et limiter leur impact ? Les spécialistes - et parmi eux, des Suisses - en discutent cette semaine à Kobe. Les discussions entre représentants de 70 pays porteront naturellement surtout sur les tsunamis d'Asie du Sud. La Conférence mondiale sur la prévention des catastrophes naturelles s'achèvera samedi. Elle a pour cadre la ville japonaise de Kobe, dévastée par un tremblement de terre en janvier 1995. «Nous aimerions voir, dans de nombreux pays, un changement culturel dans la manière d'envisager les catastrophes», explique Marco Ferrari, chef adjoint du Corps suisse d'aide humanitaire et membre de la délégation helvétique. «Concrètement, ce changement doit mener à intégrer les autorités fédérales et locales, les scientifiques et les assureurs au sein d'une structure légale de réduction des risques», ajoute-t-il à l'intention de swissinfo. «Dans bien des pays, ce sera la seule voie pour pouvoir prétendre à un système de surveillance et d'alerte rapide.» Alerte rapide - La conférence de Kobe est censée mener à l'élaboration d'une stratégie et d'un plan d'action sur dix ans, destinés à réduire les risques naturels du type tremblements de terre ou inondations. Selon le coordinateur de l'aide d'urgence à l'ONU, ce genre d'événements touchent autant de personnes, si ce n'est davantage, que les conflits

humains. Mais contrairement aux conséquences de la violence humaine, il est souvent possible d'anticiper leur impact, rappelle Jan Egeland. «Nous comprenons ce type de risque, explique le Norvégien. De plus, il existe des manières de préparer les individus comme les communautés à y réagir.» Les discussions menées à Kobe devraient surtout porter sur les conditions nécessaires au redémarrage des pays et régions touchés par les tsunamis du 26 décembre (150'000 morts au moins, et 5 millions de personnes privées d'infrastructures de base). Le sommet était prévu de longue date. Et le désastre asiatique ne fait que souligner la nécessité de systèmes d'alerte rapides et d'une préparation qui peut faire la différence entre la vie et la mort, assure de son côté Marco Ferrari. «Les catastrophes naturelles, les tremblements de terre vont continuer à se produire, avec des résultats dramatiques, poursuit le Suisse. Mais nous espérons que la tragédie asiatique servira à démontrer qu'il était possible de prévenir tous ces morts, et qu'il faut faire quelque chose dans ce but.» «Ce n'est pas simplement la faute des pays touchés, ajoute le délégué helvétique. Tout le monde a une part de responsabilité à assumer dans la réduction des risques. Et particulièrement la communauté internationale». Les montagnes aussi sont dangereuses - Reste que si la vulnérabilité des îles et des régions côtières devrait dominer les débats, la Suisse compte pouvoir souligner aussi les besoins des zones de montagne. La plate-forme nationale «Dangers naturels» (PLANAT) et la direction du développement et de la coopération (DDC) ont ainsi prévu une présentation thématique, basée sur la vaste expérience de la Suisse en matière d'avalanches ou de glissements de terrain. Pour expliquer la politique de prévention et d'action de la Suisse, cet atelier prendra comme exemple le canton du Valais. Les dangers naturels y sont nombreux et plusieurs catastrophes majeures s'y sont produites ces dernières années. La méthode suisse est basée sur une approche «holistique», qui fait intervenir la prévention, la réaction à l'événement et la reconstruction, aussi bien que le dialogue avec des spécialistes de l'aide et avec les populations affectées. Un élément-clé de cet atelier sera de mettre en évidence les relations de la Suisse avec d'autres pays et l'importance du partage des informations. «Qu'il s'agisse d'avalanches, de fonte des glaciers ou d'inondations, la Suisse a beaucoup d'expériences à partager», souligne Marco Ferrari. «Ce genre d'atelier nous permettra aussi d'apprendre des expériences des autres et de ramener des connaissances utiles au pays», ajoute le délégué suisse à la Conférence de Kobe.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Liberation

AUTHOR: Michel Temman

DATE: 18 January

A Kobe, des experts sous pression

KOBE -- Révue de longue date, la conférence des Nations unies sur la prévention des catastrophes naturelles, qui s'ouvre aujourd'hui à Kobe, au Japon, a valeur de double symbole. Les 3 000 experts de 150 pays venus plancher jusqu'à vendredi sur les moyens de mieux prévenir les risques de séismes, d'inondations, de cyclones, d'éruptions volcaniques et autres désastres se réunissent alors que les douze pays de l'océan Indien victimes du tsunami du 26 décembre poursuivent le décompte de leurs morts et disparus. L'effroyable bilan (168 000 morts hier soir) devrait encore s'alourdir durant les quatre jours de la grand-messe onusienne. Propositions urgentes. Autre symbole, les experts et officiels se sont donné rendez-vous à Kobe, grand port du Japon détruit il y a dix ans jour pour jour par un séisme d'une magnitude 7,2 sur l'échelle de Richter. Survenu à l'aube du 17 janvier 1995, son bilan avait été particulièrement lourd : 6 433 morts, 70 000 blessés, 200 000

habitations détruites et 300 000 sinistrés dont un tiers est tombé au chômage. Et un coût financier total estimé à 100 milliards de dollars pour la préfecture de Hyogo, ce qui en fait l'une des catastrophes naturelles les plus coûteuses de l'histoire. Dans la ville de Kobe de nouveau debout et reconstruite avec les technologies antisismiques dernier cri, l'Organisation des Nations unies n'a jamais été aussi attendue sur un agenda et des propositions concrètes et urgentes. Pour preuve, l'idée d'origine de la conférence - dresser le bilan du plan d'action mis en oeuvre après la conférence de Yokohama sur les calamités naturelles de 1994 - a été mise de côté pour répondre aux impératifs de l'actualité. En deux semaines, le menu de la conférence a été étoffé et sa problématique réorientée. A la dernière minute, deux séances ont été ajoutées, chacune devant exposer les moyens les plus efficaces et rapides pour mettre au point un système d'alerte aux tsunamis, dont le coût est évalué à 30 millions de dollars (près de 23 millions d'euros). Somme qualifiée de «brouille» par le directeur de l'Unesco, le Japonais Koichiro Matsuura. Pourtant, rien ne dit que la raison collective l'emportera. Plusieurs pays (Etats-Unis, Japon, Inde, France, Australie...) arrivent à Kobe avec des propositions très diverses, pour ne pas dire opposées, au risque de la cacophonie. Alors que la France souhaite installer un centre d'alerte à l'île de La Réunion, le Japon propose de mettre en place sur dix ans des sismomètres et des systèmes de positionnement par GPS en plus de cent endroits disséminés dans l'océan Indien. La Thaïlande prône de toute façon l'installation d'un système de toute urgence. La mise au point rapide d'un outil d'alerte aurait en effet le mérite de rassurer des populations encore sous le choc, voire traumatisées. D'après les experts de l'ONU, quelle que soit la solution retenue, il faudra patienter au moins jusqu'à l'été 2006 pour pouvoir le mettre en place. Et 2007 avant qu'il ne devienne vraiment opérationnel. «Bouchons humanitaires». Hôte de la conférence, et deuxième pays à s'être engagé en faveur des pays touchés par le tsunami par le montant de ses aides (750 millions de dollars à ce jour, soit 574 millions d'euros), le Japon proposera en outre, d'ici à vendredi, la mise en place d'une base de données mondiale sur les efforts de secours et de reconstruction après un désastre (lire ci-dessous). En Indonésie, à Banda Aceh, l'exemple a montré qu'une aide mal coordonnée entre Etats, armées et ONG pouvait donner lieu à la confusion et à des «bouchons humanitaires» désastreux (Libération d'hier). Si, pour les experts, les catastrophes naturelles ne peuvent être prévenues, le nombre de leurs victimes pourrait cependant être bien moindre grâce à de meilleures stratégies préventives et des politiques de coordination entre Etats. Ces dix dernières années, les catastrophes naturelles ont, selon l'ONU, coûté la vie à 478 000 personnes dans 7 000 désastres qui ont causé 800 milliards de dollars de dégâts.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Le Monde

AUTHOR:

DATE: 18 January

Ouverture de la conférence de Kobé sur la prévention des catastrophes naturelles

Un système d'alerte global aux tsunamis sera étudié par plusieurs milliers d'experts, à l'occasion du dixième anniversaire du terrible séisme qui avait détruit ce port japonais en 1995 et provoqué la mort de 6 433 personnes. Les Nations unies ont ouvert, mardi 18 janvier, à Kobé (Japon), une conférence mondiale sur la prévention des catastrophes naturelles, où plus de 3 000 experts et officiels d'environ 150 pays vont notamment se pencher sur un futur système d'alerte global aux tsunamis. Au début de la conférence, le secrétaire général de l'ONU, Kofi Annan, a souhaité dans

un message diffusé aux participants que la conférence de Kobé serve à "aider les communautés, les nations et les citoyens face aux catastrophes naturelles et à mobiliser les ressources et protéger les populations". "Ce n'est pas suffisant de recoller les morceaux", a souligné le secrétaire général dans ce message enregistré à l'avance et diffusé après qu'un moment de silence eut été observé à la mémoire des victimes du tsunami. "Nous devons retenir toutes les leçons pour éviter que se reproduise ce genre de catastrophe à l'avenir." Dans un message, le sous-secrétaire général pour les affaires humanitaires de l'ONU, le Norvégien Jan Egeland, a proposé qu'"au moins 10 % des sommes énormes versées aujourd'hui en faveur des opérations de secours d'urgence dans le monde soient consacrés à la prévention des désastres". "Je suis complètement conscient des sommes qui sont dépensées (...) pour panser les blessures", a ajouté Jan Egeland. SE PRÉPARER AUX MENACES À VENIR - De son côté, l'empereur du Japon, Akihito, a estimé que "la coopération internationale est essentielle pour les efforts de secours et de reconstruction" et souhaité que l'Archipel, souvent frappé par des catastrophes naturelles, puisse faire bénéficier d'autres pays de son expérience. "Les dégâts occasionnés par les catastrophes naturelles varient d'une région à l'autre. Il est néanmoins possible de coopérer par-delà les frontières, d'apprendre des expériences passées et de se préparer aux menaces à venir", a poursuivi l'empereur. La conférence de Kobé, prévue de longue date, a pris une nouvelle importance à la suite des raz de marée qui ont dévasté les côtes de l'océan Indien le mois dernier, faisant près de 175 000 morts à ce jour. Outre les bilans et travaux prévus sur différents risques naturels, à l'occasion du dixième anniversaire du terrible séisme qui avait détruit ce port le 17 janvier 1995 et provoqué la mort de 6 433 personnes, les participants vont se pencher jusqu'à la fin de la semaine sur la mise en place d'un vaste système d'alerte aux tsunamis. Deux sessions ont été ajoutées à la hâte à l'ordre du jour, afin de discuter de ce projet. La conférence s'est fixé pour objectif de "motiver et guider" les Etats afin qu'ils accordent plus d'attention à l'intégration de la gestion des risques de catastrophe dans la réduction de la pauvreté. A l'origine, cette rencontre internationale devait faire le bilan de la mise en œuvre de la "stratégie" et du "plan d'action" adoptés lors d'une première conférence sur le même thème à Yokohama, près de Tokyo, en 1994. Un nouveau programme d'action pour la décennie 2005-2015 sera finalisé durant la conférence.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Liberation

AUTHOR: Michel Temman

DATE: 19 January

La Conférence de l'ONU sur les catastrophes naturelles à Kobe - La planète tremble pour son avenir - Les délégués des 120 pays peinent à s'accorder sur des actions concrètes de prévention.

KOBE -- «Le meilleur moyen d'honorer les morts est de protéger les vivants.» Dès l'ouverture, hier, de la conférence des Nations unies sur la réduction des désastres, qui se tient à Kobe jusqu'à vendredi en présence de 3 000 délégués de 120 pays, le sous-secrétaire général de l'ONU pour les affaires humanitaires a résumé le message. «Nous nous réunissons dans l'ombre d'un des pires désastres naturels de l'histoire moderne, une tragédie dont l'ampleur ne sera peut-être jamais connue, a déclaré Jan Egeland, en hommage aux 170 000 victimes du tsunami en Asie. Il n'y a pas de temps à perdre. Comme le tsunami nous l'a montré, des désastres locaux peuvent avoir un impact global. Cela nous a rappelé qu'aux risques globaux, les vraies solutions étaient globales.» Spécial tsunami. Priorité à la responsabilité et à la

prévention des risques, donc. Cette conférence, qui fait suite à celle tenue au Japon en 1994 - qui avait donné lieu à la «stratégie de Yokohama» aux contours plutôt flous -, aboutira-t-elle pour autant à des actions concrètes ? «L'objectif, dit-on à Kobe, c'est d'abord de parvenir à des déclarations communes !» Demain, une session «spécial tsunami», très attendue, rassemblera des officiels de chacun des douze pays touchés, afin de tirer les leçons de la catastrophe, de réfléchir à un système d'alerte commun et aux moyens de redonner vie aux milliers de kilomètres de côtes dévastées dans l'océan Indien. Tsunamis, ouragans, cyclones, inondations géantes, tremblements de terre dévastateurs comme celui de Bam, fin 2003 en Iran (30 000 morts en 10 minutes...), comment parer aux désastres de la nature ? «La seule réponse, c'est la prévention, explique Bishnu H. Pandey, un ingénieur népalais, spécialiste du risque sismique. Il est important que l'on décide de calendriers et d'actions concrètes. Décider, par exemple, que d'ici à 2010, dans les quelque soixante pays menacés par des tremblements de terre, les écoles soient toutes bâties avec des techniques antisismiques. Comment peut-on encore accepter qu'en cas de séisme, une école s'écroule sur des enfants ?» Pour ce scientifique en colère, l'enjeu de la prévention, c'est la volonté politique. «Sans la volonté des gouvernements, tonne-t-il, ingénieurs et scientifiques ne sont d'aucune utilité. Cette conférence de Kobe, trois semaines après le tsunami, doit donc reposer la question des rapports entre scientifiques et politiques. Il faut mettre en place de nouvelles grilles de communication et de travail entre ceux qui peuvent agir pour prévenir.» Vieux débats. Il n'est pas certain que l'appel du Népalais perce les murs du grand hôtel Portopia, où se tient la conférence. Car dans les discussions ressurgissent de vieux débats. «La prévention des risques n'est pas uniquement un sujet politique, tempère Juan Villagrán de León, un chercheur de l'Institut onusien pour l'environnement et la sécurité humaine. On voit des politiques de prévention se heurter à des obstacles sociaux, économiques ou culturels. Dans certains pays, les populations veulent habiter à un endroit, pourtant très dangereux, parce qu'elles y sont nées ou parce qu'il garantit un revenu. Les gens doivent apprendre à être responsables.»

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Le Figaro
AUTHOR: Régis Arnaud
DATE: 19 January

L'ONU se mobilise à Kobé pour la prévention des séismes

KOBE -- «Rarement une tragédie a rendu une conférence autant d'actualité et opportune» : ainsi Kofi Annan a-t-il salué l'ouverture, hier à Kobé, de la conférence de l'ONU sur la prévention des catastrophes naturelles. L'événement, qui n'était à l'origine prévu que pour quelques centaines de spécialistes et diplomates concernés, a pris, en un mois, une dimension mondiale. Le souvenir des souffrances du séisme qui, il y a dix ans exactement, dévastait Kobé, s'est télescopé avec celui du terrible tsunami du 26 décembre dernier lors de la minute de silence qui a ouvert la conférence. Quelque 4 000 représentants nationaux et experts sont réunis jusqu'à vendredi pour réfléchir à de nouvelles mesures pour parer aux calamités naturelles. Le Japon, que son développement n'a pas mis à l'abri des désastres, a proposé dès hier la mise en place d'un centre mondial des dangers liés à l'eau et d'une banque de données des leçons tirées des catastrophes. Un système d'alerte aux tsunamis couvrant l'océan Indien devrait être annoncé demain. Les participants de la conférence, aussi grave que soit leur ton, veulent en finir avec le fatalisme. «Les habitants des régions touchées sont de plus en plus résistants. Nous développons

un véritable savoir-faire dans la gestion des crises», assure Chowdhury Yusuf, ministre des Catastrophes naturelles du Bangladesh, qui détaille la baisse du nombre de victimes des calamités ravageant régulièrement son pays. «Nous ne pouvons éviter les désastres, mais nous pouvons diminuer leur impact», assure-t-il. Une constatation heureuse reprise par Jan Egeland, sous-secrétaire général pour les Affaires humanitaires de l'ONU : «Il est difficile d'attirer l'attention du monde sur la prévention. Mais un dollar de prévention permet d'éviter 10 dollars de dégâts», dit-il. «Regardez l'ouragan qui a ravagé les Caraïbes l'an dernier : la même force a provoqué 3 000 morts à Haïti, et aucun à Cuba. La prévention est vitale», explique le secrétaire général de l'Agence de météorologie mondiale, Michel Jarraud. «Toutes les populations vulnérables seront protégées par des systèmes d'alerte», d'ici dix ans, promet Jan Egeland. Celui-ci a proposé qu'au moins 10% des sommes versées aujourd'hui pour les opérations de secours d'urgence soient consacrées à la prévention. «La coopération internationale est essentielle pour les efforts de secours et de reconstruction» a plaidé l'empereur du Japon Akihito. «Coopération» est le mot manquant lorsqu'on écoute, au niveau local, les témoignages des rescapés du tremblement de terre de Kobé (17 janvier 1995), contraints de travailler dans un chaos total. Face à un tel séisme, l'impréparation des autorités a coûté des milliers de vies. Osamu Hashida, chef de la brigade de sapeurs-pompiers de Nagata, le quartier le plus meurtri par la catastrophe, se souvient : «Il y a eu 12 incendies en même temps. Nous n'avions pas assez d'eau, et cinq camions seulement. Les voitures roulaient sur nos pompes et les brisaient», raconte ce petit homme, à la voix encore tremblante d'impuissance. «Les volontaires souvent gênaient nos efforts plus qu'ils ne nous aidaient, nous ne savions pas comment les employer», se remémore-t-il. Une visite à l'association locale des habitants de Nagata donne une idée des inextricables problèmes qui se posent à une communauté après une catastrophe naturelle, même dans une société relativement aisée. Les autorités de la ville ont racheté l'ensemble du quartier et tracé d'autorité des routes plus larges que par le passé pour faciliter l'arrivée des secours en cas de catastrophe. Ce faisant, ils ont diminué d'autant les surfaces habitables. «La mairie ne s'intéresse pas à nos initiatives et est injuste. A l'est du quartier ils ont dépensé 10 milliards de yens, et rien à l'est !», se plaint amèrement Tetsuji Kawai, un jeune leader local.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Swiss Info (French Service)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 20 January

Tsunamis: les donateurs tiennent leurs promesses, selon l'ONU

KOBE -- Les donateurs tiennent leurs promesses d'assistance financière après les tsunamis dévastateurs en Asie, s'est félicitée jeudi l'ONU. Jusqu'ici, 86% des 977 millions de dollars réclamés pour répondre aux besoins des zones sinistrées ont été "couverts". "La réponse des donateurs n'a jamais été meilleure, plus généreuse, ni plus rapide", a déclaré le coordinateur des opérations d'urgence des Nations unies, le Norvégien Jan Egeland, lors d'une conférence internationale sur la prévention des catastrophes naturelles à Kobé (ouest du Japon). Selon M. Egeland, 86% des 977 millions de dollars réclamés le 6 janvier par le secrétaire général de l'ONU, Kofi Annan, pour répondre aux besoins des zones sinistrées dans les six prochains mois, ont été "couverts". 60% de cette somme ont déjà été transférés, a-t-il précisé. "C'est la première fois que personne n'a eu faim et que personne n'a manqué de soins médicaux faute de ressources", s'est réjoui M. Egeland. "Il n'y a pas eu la seconde vague de maladies et de destruction que nous craignons", a-t-il dit. "J'aimerais

pouvoir en dire autant du Soudan, du Congo, de la Côte d'Ivoire et de bien d'autres situations d'urgence où les gens souffrent tout autant que sur les plages de l'océan Indien", a-t-il toutefois nuancé. Le plus gros contributeur en faveur des rescapés des tsunamis asiatiques est le Japon.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press (French Service)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 20 January

L'ONU veut se charger de la mise en place d'un système d'alerte aux tsunamis

KOBE -- Les Nations unies devraient présider la création d'un système d'alerte aux tsunamis dans l'océan Indien, a estimé hier le sous-secrétaire général de l'ONU pour les affaires humanitaires, Jan Egeland, lors de la conférence de Kobé sur la prévention des catastrophes naturelles. L'ONU devrait jouer un rôle central pour affiner et coordonner les diverses propositions avancées afin de créer un tel dispositif, a précisé M. Egeland. L'Organisation des Nations unies pour l'éducation, la science et la culture (Unesco) a notamment proposé un système comprenant des bouées en eau profonde, des jauges de marée et un centre d'alerte régional, qui coûterait 30 millions de dollars et serait opérationnel courant 2006. Les coûts d'un tel dispositif pourraient être financés avec une partie des quatre milliards de dollars promis aux pays frappés par les raz-de-marée du 26 décembre, selon M. Egeland. Avec tout l'argent que s'est engagée à verser la communauté internationale, «il ne devrait pas être difficile de trouver 30 millions de dollars pour un tel système», souligne-t-il. Des opinions divergentes se sont exprimées sur la mise en place d'un système d'alerte dans l'océan Indien similaire à celui existant dans le Pacifique, et certains craignent que des querelles d'experts ne retardent la mise en place d'un tel dispositif. Plusieurs propositions ont été avancées, notamment par l'Inde qui projette de commencer à mettre en place son réseau d'alerte et par l'Allemagne qui a plaidé pour sa propre version du dispositif. M. Egeland juge toutes les propositions «complémentaires», mais il a également souligné qu'un travail de coordination important serait nécessaire une fois que les pays auraient choisi un système donné, qui pourrait ne pas être opérationnel avant 2008 au plus tard. «La surveillance des séismes pouvant provoquer un tsunami n'est pas un problème, nous pouvons déjà le faire», a-t-il observé, ajoutant que la principale difficulté consistait à alerter les habitants des zones côtières. «En Inde, on estime qu'un système d'alerte devrait être en place d'ici 2006 [...] mais il faudra peut-être attendre 2007 ou 2008 pour que les choses fonctionnent vraiment», pour le reste de l'Asie du Sud et l'Afrique, a-t-il souligné. En marge de ce dossier, des responsables ont annoncé hier à la conférence de Kobé la décision de l'ONU de créer un système d'alerte mondial pour les tsunamis, les inondations, les typhons et d'autres catastrophes naturelles. Le Programme international d'alerte précoce (International Early Warning Program), qui est préparé depuis deux ans, est destiné à réduire les dommages causés par les catastrophes en améliorant la coopération internationale. «Il aidera à apporter la sécurité», a déclaré Salvano Briceno, un responsable de l'ONU. Ce programme doit couvrir l'ensemble de la planète et détecter toutes sortes de catastrophes naturelles, y compris les sécheresses, les incendies, les glissements de terrain et les éruptions volcaniques. Par ailleurs, la délégation américaine cherchait à purger un texte de la conférence de Kobé de toute référence au changement climatique comme cause potentielle de futures catastrophes naturelles. La position américaine reflète l'opposition de l'administration Bush à traiter le réchauffement climatique comme un problème prioritaire.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Le Monde
AUTHOR: Philippe Pons
DATE: 20 January

Un système d'alerte aux raz de marée devra être créé, d'ici un an, dans l'océan Indien

KOBE -- La conférence de Kobé sur la prévention des désastres naturels se devait de manifester une volonté commune prolongeant l'élan de solidarité qui a suivi le raz de marée du 26 décembre, tout en débouchant sur des actions concrètes et un calendrier. Au départ réunion d'experts, elle avait été élevée au rang ministériel à la suite du désastre dans l'océan Indien. La conférence a atteint ses objectifs avec l'annonce, jeudi 20 janvier, de la création sous l'égide des Nations unies d'un système global d'alerte précoce multidésastre (inondations, typhons, éruptions volcaniques, etc.) dont la première pièce sera un système d'alerte aux tsunamis dans l'océan Indien. "Un premier pas important a été franchi", a estimé Salvano Briceno, directeur de l'Agence des Nations unies pour l'élaboration d'une stratégie de réduction des catastrophes, à la clôture de la conférence. "Ce désastre -du 26 décembre- a sonné une alarme en rappelant qu'en dépit de leur diversité de leurs effets et de leur localisation géographique, les désastres naturels ont un effet global", a considéré Jan Egeland, secrétaire général adjoint des Nations unies pour les affaires humanitaires et la coordination de l'aide d'urgence. La conférence de Kobé a eu le mérite de déplacer l'attention de la réaction aux désastres à leur prévention et de déplacer le problème des administrations et des experts vers celui des gouvernements. "Un consensus général s'est incontestablement dégagé sur la nécessité d'un cadre multilatéral", a déclaré Serge Lepeltier, ministre français de l'écologie, présent à Kobé. FAIRE DE LA PRÉVENTION UNE PRIORITÉ - Les enjeux politiques n'étaient pas absents de cette réunion où chacun, tout en mettant "son expérience à la disposition des autres", poussait des coudes en coulisse pour apparaître le pivot d'une politique commune. Mais la création du système d'alerte est une avancée concrète. Un accord s'est, en outre, dégagé sur la nécessité d'agir en amont de l'urgence par une prévention intégrée à l'aide au développement. "L'impact des catastrophes est un obstacle aux politiques de développement durable : elles font faire un pas en arrière à chaque fois", dit Jan Egeland qui demande que, au cours des dix prochaines années, 10 % de l'aide d'urgence aux désastres soient affectés à la prévention de ceux-ci. Selon Michel Jarreau, secrétaire général de l'Organisation mondiale météorologique, "il ne faut pas penser à l'assistance à la prévention des risques en termes de coût mais d'investissement sur lequel il y a un "retour". Un euro dépensé en prévention signifie sept ou huit épargnés en assistance d'urgence. Le coût est dérisoire par rapport au bénéfice". Le Bangladesh est un cas d'école. Après les catastrophes naturelles des trois dernières décennies, il a réussi à réduire le nombre des victimes par la mise en place d'un système d'alerte et d'information afin de sensibiliser les populations à réagir au danger. "On ne peut pas éviter les désastres naturels mais on peut rompre le cercle vicieux de la pauvreté qui entraîne la vulnérabilité, une aide d'urgence et le retour à la pauvreté", nous dit Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, ministre de la gestion des questions alimentaires et des désastres du Bangladesh. Les Etats-Unis ont insisté sur la nécessité d'une "bonne gouvernance" dans les pays sinistrés mais il faut aussi, souligne Jan Egeland, de "bons donateurs". Pour être efficace, un système de prévention des désastres nécessite d'assembler les maillons d'une chaîne : le rassemblement des données, leur interprétation, l'émission du message d'alerte mais surtout un effort pédagogique

local. Il suppose aussi que la prévention des risques, moins spectaculaire que l'aide d'urgence, devienne une priorité des pays donateurs. "La prévention des catastrophes impose une nouvelle manière de penser", estime Klaus Tijepfer, directeur du programme environnemental des Nations unies. Dans le cas des tsunamis, le système envisagé pour l'océan Indien a comme modèle celui existant dans le Pacifique : un réseau international formé de sous-systèmes locaux de détection des séismes et d'interprétation des données transmettant leurs données au centre de coordination de Hawaï, qui les rediffuse dans la région. Dans un premier temps, le centre d'Hawaï et l'Agence météorologique japonaise seront les chevilles ouvrières du projet pour l'océan Indien. La localisation du centre de prévention pour cette région du monde devra être décidée au cours d'un sommet régional organisé en mars sous les auspices de l'Unesco qui, entre-temps, établira un centre d'études du projet à l'Institut de recherches météorologiques de Tsukuba au Japon. Le système d'un coût de 30 à 50 millions de dollars pourrait être mis en place d'ici un an.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press (French Service)

AUTHOR: Kenji Hall

Date: 20 January

La conférence de Kobé promet 8 millions de dollars pour un système d'alerte aux tsunamis

KOBE -- Plusieurs pays riches ont promis jeudi 8 millions de dollars (6 millions d'euros) à la conférence de Kobé pour la création d'un réseau permettant de détecter un raz de marée dans l'océan Indien et d'alerter les populations côtières exposées. Certains responsables avertissent toutefois que cette avancée ne doit pas faire oublier d'autres fléaux, comme les cyclones, les sécheresses et la malnutrition. Un système d'alerte aux tsunamis dans l'océan Indien est devenu une priorité depuis les raz de marée du 26 décembre qui ont frappé l'Asie du Sud, faisant quelque 220.000 morts. L'Organisation des Nations unies pour l'éducation, la science et la culture (Unesco) a proposé un réseau de bouées en eau profonde et des centres de communications régionaux: un dispositif évalué à 30 millions de dollars (23 millions d'euros) qui serait opérationnel en 2006. Salvano Briceno, directeur de la Stratégie internationale de l'ONU pour la réduction des catastrophes, souligne que 8 millions de dollars (6 millions d'euros) ont été promis jeudi, soit assez pour couvrir les coûts du dispositif la première année: le Japon s'est engagé à verser 4 millions (3 millions d'euros), la Commission européenne 2 millions d'euros (2,6 millions de dollars) et la Suède 1,5 million de dollars (1,2 million d'euros). «D'ici un an à 18 mois, il devrait y avoir une capacité régionale de base pour une système d'alerte précoce», selon M. Briceno. La conférence de Kobé, au Japon, qui s'est tenue cette semaine, a été marquée par des approches différentes sur la mise en place d'un système d'alerte. M. Briceno a souligné que les Nations unies dirigeraient les opérations et adapteraient le dispositif aux besoins des pays concernés. «Placer (le réseau) sous l'égide de l'ONU, permet d'assurer que tous les pays participeront sur un pied d'égalité», a-t-il affirmé. L'ambassadeur des Etats-Unis au Japon, Howard Baker, a indiqué jeudi que les Etats-Unis pourraient étendre le système d'alerte basé à Hawaï pour l'océan Pacifique qui a été créé en 1965. Ce réseau, qui repose sur des capteurs dans l'océan et des moyens de communications par satellite pour détecter les tsunamis, permet actuellement d'alerter 26 pays. A terme, il pourrait même être étendu à la Méditerranée, aux Caraïbes et à d'autres régions du globe, selon les responsables américains. De son côté, le Japon s'est dit prêt à partager son savoir-

faire technologique et l'Allemagne a proposé son propre système d'alerte. Si le projet de réseau d'alerte pour l'océan Indien bénéficie d'un large soutien, certains craignent qu'il n'éclipse d'autres objectifs prioritaires à la conférence de Kobé, consacrée à la prévention des catastrophes naturelles. Ils soulignent que la réunion devrait également amener la communauté internationale à s'engager sur des objectifs précis pour réduire le nombre de personnes touchées par les cyclones, les sécheresses, les inondations et d'autres fléaux. James Morris, directeur exécutif du Programme alimentaire mondial (PAM), a appelé les délégués à ne pas négliger d'autres crises majeures. «La faim et la malnutrition chroniques qui affligent 300 millions d'enfants dans le monde ne suscitent pas la couverture médiatique spectaculaire d'un tsunami mais elles causent une souffrance bien plus grande», a-t-il dit. «Il ne faut pas perdre cela de vue. C'est aussi une urgence.»

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press (French Service)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 22 January

La conférence de Kobé adopte un plan d'action pour prévenir les catastrophes naturelles

KOBE -- Près d'un mois après le séisme et le tsunami qui ont fait entre 162.000 à 221.000 morts en Asie du Sud, les délégués des Nations unies ont adopté samedi un plan d'action visant à réduire les victimes et les dégâts provoqués par les catastrophes naturelles, lors de la clôture de la conférence internationale de Kobé, au Japon. Après des réunions qui se sont prolongées tard dans la nuit, les délégués ont finalement voté samedi un plan d'action onusien qui appelle les nations à partager les informations et données météorologiques fournies par satellite, de dresser des cartes des risques naturels, et de formuler des stratégies de gestion de crise pour les communautés locales au cours de la prochaine décennie. Le plan d'action appelle également la communauté internationale à s'engager à fournir des fonds destinés au nettoyage et au travail humanitaire sur le terrain après des catastrophes naturelles. Selon les derniers chiffres de l'Organisation mondiale de la météorologie, entre 1992 et 2001, les cyclones, les inondations, les sécheresses et autres catastrophes ont tué 622.000 personnes, touché plus de deux milliards d'habitants de la planète, tout en entraînant environ 446 milliards de pertes économiques. Le sous-secrétaire général de l'ONU pour les affaires humanitaires, Jan Egeland, a déclaré samedi que sa «conviction personnelle» était que le nombre des morts provoqués par les catastrophes «devrait être réduit de moitié par rapport à la décennie passée». «Cela signifie sauver des centaines de milliers et des millions de vies», a-t-il déclaré aux délégués réunis à Kobé. Le plan d'action voté samedi ne propose toutefois pas d'objectifs concrets ni d'un moyen pour évaluer les progrès faits en la matière. Marco Ferrari, un responsable suisse à la tête du comité chargé de rédiger le plan, a estimé que l'absence d'engagements concrets en termes d'argent et d'objectifs risquait de décevoir certains délégués. «Toutefois, je pense que nous avons atteint notre objectif clé -l'accord sur comment lancer et promouvoir la culture d'une réduction des catastrophes», a-t-il déclaré. La conférence de cinq jours organisée à Kobé avait pour but d'aider les nations de la planète à se préparer aux catastrophes naturelles, des inondations aux séismes en passant par les tempêtes et autres phénomènes climatiques. Après le drame qui a frappé les pays riverains de l'Océan indien le 26 décembre, cette conférence s'est notamment penchée sur la nécessité de doter les pays de l'Océan indien d'un système d'alerte du tsunami.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Liberation:
AUTHOR Patrick Sabatier
DATE: 22 January

Prévention: Se préparer

Nul ne pourra jamais empêcher la Terre en furie, sous l'aspect de tsunami, séisme, ouragan, éruption volcanique, inondation ou avalanche, de balayer comme fétus de paille les hommes qui s'agitent à sa surface. On peut donc juger aussi utopique que vaine l'ambition affichée à Kobe par les Nations unies de prévenir, et réduire, les ravages infligés à l'humanité par les catastrophes naturelles. Il faut pourtant se préparer au pire. Certes, le spectacle donné par les milliers d'experts et diplomates rassemblés dans la cité japonaise n'a pas été très édifiant. Alors qu'on s'emploie encore à porter secours aux victimes du tsunami de l'océan Indien, tout ce beau monde, unanime pour vouloir faire quelque chose, et d'urgence, a conclu, au terme d'une longue palabre, qu'il était urgent de se donner encore un peu de temps pour organiser une autre palabre, et décider à quel pays reviendra le prestige de doter l'Asie du Sud d'un système d'alerte aux tsunamis. Seule la coopération internationale, dont l'ONU est l'unique incarnation légitime, peut prétendre oeuvrer à prévenir et réduire autant que possible des fléaux par nature indifférents aux frontières. Mais l'ONU est handicapée par le manque de volonté politique des Etats qui la composent, et trop souvent paralysée par l'affrontement d'ambitions nationales, sans parler de sa propre bureaucratie. L'urgence suscite de grands élans de solidarité et la mobilisation de grands moyens. Il faut souhaiter qu'elle accélère une prise de conscience. Car on doit se préoccuper des catastrophes naturelles bien avant qu'elles ne frappent si on veut en amortir les chocs. Et ce d'autant plus que la croissance démographique et l'urbanisation galopante de la planète entraîneront une multiplication exponentielle des victimes lorsque d'autres catastrophes naturelles, inévitables, ravageront des mégapoles. Le pire n'est jamais sûr, à condition de s'y préparer.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Liberation
AUTHOR: Michel Temman
DATE: 22 January

L'ONU cherche l'arme anticataclysmes

KOBE -- Cette semaine, à Kobe, l'ONU a sauvé in extremis son âme, en décidant de bâtir un système d'alerte aux tsunamis dans l'océan Indien sur le même modèle que celui d'Hawaï, qui protège depuis quarante ans les pays du Pacifique. En présence de plus de 3 000 scientifiques, ingénieurs, et diplomates de 120 pays réunis pour une conférence internationale sur la prévention des catastrophes naturelles, les responsables des Nations unies se sont engagés à superviser ce programme. De quoi contribuer (un peu) au «repos de l'esprit» des sinistrés du tsunami en Asie du Sud. Mais pas de quoi pavoiser. Du fait de la complexité des outils à intégrer (spatiaux, sous-marins, etc.), le lancement du système n'est pas imminent. D'un coût évalué à 30 millions de dollars (23 millions d'euros), puis à 15 millions de dollars par an en frais de fonctionnement, il ne sera prêt que «dans un an environ, dix-huit mois au plus tard», a précisé Salvano Briceno, responsable de la stratégie de l'ONU pour

la prévention des désastres. Bonnes intentions. Près d'un mois après le tsunami en Asie du Sud qui a fait au moins 219 000 morts, la conférence de Kobe a montré les limites de la mobilisation internationale. La Croix-Rouge s'en est alarmée, qui a dénoncé dès le milieu de la semaine le risque que la réunion n'aboutisse à «aucune décision ferme». Les réticences et blocages de certains Etats font que, vendredi encore, les négociateurs peinaient à se mettre d'accord sur la moindre annonce. Négocié à Genève douze jours avant le tsunami, le rapport final de la grand-messe de Kobe, simple catalogue de bonnes intentions, a dû être revu et étoffé à la dernière minute, à la lumière du cataclysme du 26 décembre. Dans la soirée de vendredi, les 50 pays membres du comité décisionnaire ont tout de même fini par accoucher d'un rapport de 25 pages qui devait être signé dans la matinée de samedi à Kobe. Intitulé «Cadre d'actions 2005-2015 : pour des Nations et des collectivités résilientes face aux catastrophes», il énumère quelques mesures prioritaires de bon sens : «veiller à ce que la réduction des risques de catastrophe soit une priorité nationale et locale», «identifier, évaluer et surveiller les risques de catastrophe», «renforcer les systèmes d'alerte rapide», «utiliser les connaissances, les innovations et l'éducation pour édifier une culture de la sécurité à tous les niveaux», «réduire les facteurs de risques» et «renforcer la préparation en prévision des catastrophes afin d'assurer l'efficacité des interventions». Victimes. Principal objectif du rapport: la réduction des pertes en vies humaines. «Il s'agit de baisser de moitié, d'ici à dix ans, le nombre des victimes», précise Michel Jarraud, secrétaire général de l'Organisation météorologique mondiale (OMM) de l'ONU. Les désastres naturels ont tué plus de 600 000 personnes depuis dix ans et «plus de 200 millions de personnes ont été touchées chaque année par des catastrophes au cours des deux dernières décennies», est-il noté en préambule du rapport. Soit 2,5 milliards d'individus. «Ce rapport est une bonne plate-forme de travail. Il va motiver les Etats. On va pouvoir aller de l'avant», juge Rodolfo de Guzman, directeur de la planification stratégique au sein de l'Organisation météorologique mondiale. Au-delà du système d'alerte aux tsunamis dans l'océan Indien, l'ONU veut travailler à la mise en place d'un système de prévention et d'alerte antidésastres naturels à l'échelle du globe : contre les inondations (37 % des catastrophes), ouragans, cyclones et typhons (28 %), sécheresses et famines (9 %), séismes (8 %), etc. Couplé à des mesures parfois très simples, comme «répandre chez les gens une culture de la résilience». «La prévention commence sur le terrain», explique Avinash Tyagi, un haut fonctionnaire indien chargé de l'hydrologie à l'ONU. «La priorité pour mon agence comme pour toutes celles des Nations unies, ajoute Michel Jarraud, c'est de renforcer les capacités des pays en développement. Capacités techniques mais aussi humaines. Cela doit passer par des actions de formation des spécialistes mais aussi des décideurs et du public.» Tournant. De nombreux ingénieurs, géophysiciens, météorologues, sismologues et volcanologues ont l'impression d'avoir été écoutés et compris malgré leur jargon souvent compliqué. «Seul l'avenir permettra de prendre au mot l'ONU», se méfie pourtant un membre d'une ONG africaine présent à Kobe. «La conférence de Kobe a marqué un tournant», affirme au contraire Terry Jeggle, haut fonctionnaire américain qui a passé trente-cinq ans de sa vie sur le terrain, du Bangladesh à l'Ouganda, y travaillant pour l'ONU à la prévention des désastres. Un petit tournant.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Agence France Presse:

AUTHOR:

DATE: 22 January

Après les tsunamis, la communauté internationale s'engage dans la prévention

KOBE -- La communauté internationale s'est engagée samedi à mettre en place des systèmes d'alerte précoce et à faire de la prévention une priorité budgétaire après les tsunamis meurtriers en Asie, à l'issue de cinq jours d'âpres discussions à Kobé (ouest du Japon). La conférence de l'ONU qui a eu lieu à Kobé pendant cinq jours s'est achevée sans grand résultat en dehors de la mise en place de systèmes d'alerte précoce. Elle a surtout évité de fixer des objectifs précis. Le coordinateur de l'aide humanitaire de l'ONU, Jan Egeland, a toutefois affirmé qu'une "interprétation fidèle" des promesses des derniers jours à Kobé "permettrait de sauver des centaines de milliers de vies et des millions de gagne-pain". "UN MONDE PLUS SÛR"- "Le monde ne sera peut-être pas un endroit plus sûr la semaine prochaine mais il devrait l'être d'ici un an et il le sera certainement à la fin de la décennie", a souligné le Norvégien. Les discussions se sont poursuivies tard dans la nuit pour parvenir à un accord avant la clôture de la réunion qui a rassemblé à Kobé 4 500 experts et officiels de quelque 150 pays. Certains participants souhaitaient vivement que les objectifs de la conférence de Kobé soient plus détaillés, comme le calendrier et le financement des actions prévues dans le cadre de la prévention des catastrophes. M. Egeland a reconnu que les conclusions de la conférence de Kobé étaient largement symboliques mais il a défendu l'utilité "morale" d'une telle rencontre. "Les décisions de cette conférence ne sont pas des documents légalement contraignants mais elles traduisent un engagement moral fort des Etats et des organisations pour guider notre politique et nos actions dans les dix prochaines années", a-t-il dit. Le dirigeant onusien a promis qu'un chargé de mission présenterait des "indicateurs chiffrés" dans les prochains mois afin de faire le point des progrès. RÔLE CAPITAL DE L'ONU - La Fédération internationale des sociétés de la Croix-Rouge avait notamment appelé à "l'adoption de lignes directrices et d'objectifs bien définis". "Tout le monde aurait voulu associer des objectifs précis à des indicateurs précis pour suivre les progrès des mesures engagées. Nous aurions par exemple fixé un nombre d'écoles et d'hôpitaux devant être rendus sûrs sur les dix prochaines années", a reconnu Salvano Briceno, le responsable de la stratégie internationale de l'ONU pour la prévention des désastres, dans une interview à l'AFP. "Nous aurions pu faire plus s'il n'y avait pas eu le tsunami, nous aurions eu plus de temps pour nous concentrer sur un cadre d'action", a admis M. Briceno. Dans sa déclaration commune finale, la conférence de Kobé estime qu'"il est vital de donner une grande priorité à la réduction des risques de désastres dans le cadre des politiques nationales". "Nous sommes déterminés à réduire, partout dans le monde, les pertes socio-économiques et les atteintes à l'environnement causées parmi les catastrophes", ajoute la déclaration dite de Hyogo, du nom de la préfecture japonaise où se trouve le port de Kobé. "Nous réaffirmons le rôle capital du système des Nations unies à tous les niveaux dans la réduction des risques de catastrophe", souligne la déclaration. Les Nations unies ont été chargées de superviser les opérations dans la construction d'un système d'alerte aux tsunamis pour l'Océan indien face à une multitude de propositions de technologies par des pays donateurs. L'Australie, l'Allemagne, le Japon et les Etats-Unis ont tous proposé l'utilisation de leur système de prévision dans l'Océan indien. L'ONU va étudier les différences entre ces technologies en vue de mettre en place un système régional en 12 ou 18 mois.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Reuters
AUTHOR: Elaine Lies
DATE: 22 January

La conférence de Kobé s'achève sans grand résultat

KOBE -- Les promesses d'un système d'alerte aux tsunamis dans l'océan Indien risquent de constituer le seul résultat concret de la conférence mondiale de Kobé sur la prévention des catastrophes naturelles qui s'achève samedi. Le désastre sans précédent du 26 décembre, qui a fait au moins 225.000 morts, avait fait de la mise en place d'un tel système une priorité consensuelle de la conférence de Kobé, et il devrait être opérationnel d'ici un an à un an et demi, indiquait-on samedi de sources autorisées. Mais certains délégués estiment en le déplorant que la catastrophe asiatique a d'une certaine manière détourné l'attention de ce qui devait être au centre de cette conférence organisée sous l'égide l'Onu: convaincre les pays riches d'investir en amont de petites sommes pour réduire les bilans des catastrophes naturelles. Au premier jour de la réunion, mardi, Jan Egeland, secrétaire général adjoint aux affaires humanitaires et coordonnateur des secours d'urgence des Nations unies, avait proposé que "10% des fonds débloqués pour l'aide d'urgence soient alloués aux mesures de prévention des risques". L'objectif est plus facile à énoncer qu'à remplir. "La réduction de la vulnérabilité (aux catastrophes naturelles) est une tâche à long terme. Ce n'est pas un thème sexy, c'est difficile à vendre et c'est donc sur ce thème que l'on aurait aimé un peu plus d'attention", regrette Daniel Kull, conseiller du Consortium prévention, une ONG basée à Genève. Les délégués ont travaillé jusque tard dans la nuit de vendredi à samedi pour élaborer une déclaration finale. Mais ce texte ne devrait comporter ni objectif chiffré, ni outils de contrôle permettant de s'assurer que les pays tiendront leurs promesses. "Sans prise en compte des risques de catastrophe dans l'aide au développement, les sociétés sont plus vulnérables aux catastrophes", relève ainsi le projet de texte. **ARRIÃ`RE-PENSEES POLITIQUES** - "Nous sommes extrêmement préoccupés", indique John Sparrow, de la Fédération internationale des sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge. "La formulation de certains passages est si vague qu'il est difficile de comprendre ce que, au-delà de la rhétorique, ils signifient vraiment." Des divergences sont même apparues sur la mise en place du système d'alerte aux tsunamis dans l'océan Indien. Lors d'une session spéciale, jeudi, la France, l'Allemagne, les Etats-Unis et le Japon furent parmi les rares pays à formuler des propositions conjointes tandis que l'Inde soumettait son propre projet. Pour certains, cette concurrence masque mal les ambitions et motivations politiques de ces pays. L'Onu dément toute rivalité entre nations et soutient qu'elle continuera de coordonner le processus dans les semaines et les mois à venir pour s'assurer du succès de l'entreprise. "Je crains qu'une concurrence soit malheureusement possible, comme ce fut le cas avec les dons", souligne néanmoins Walter Ammann, directeur du département des catastrophes naturelles à Davos, en Suisse. "On ne peut pas simplement se donner bonne conscience en mettant en place un système d'alerte onéreux et penser que le problème est réglé", ajoute-t-il. L'aspect technique n'est en effet qu'une partie du problème, alors que la formation et l'éducation des populations concernées - que faire en cas d'alerte - sont elles beaucoup plus importantes mais aussi plus difficiles à régler.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Reuters

AUTHOR: Elaine Lies

DATE: 22 January

Des promesses mais peu de mesures à la conférence de Kobe

KOBE -- Les participants à la conférence de Kobe se sont quittés samedi en prenant l'engagement de réduire le nombre des victimes des catastrophes naturelles au cours de la prochaine décennie mais les ONG ont regretté l'absence de mesures concrètes pour atteindre cet objectif. Cette conférence de cinq jours au Japon a tout de même débouché sur l'annonce de la création d'un système d'alerte aux raz-de-marée dans l'océan Indien, après la mort de plus de 225.000 personnes tuées par des vagues sismiques dans cette région le 26 décembre. Cette catastrophe avait fait de la mise en place d'un tel système une priorité consensuelle de la conférence de Kobe, et l'Onu espère le voir fonctionner d'ici un an à un an et demi. "Toutes les personnes menacées par des catastrophes naturelles ont le droit de bénéficier de systèmes d'alerte", a déclaré Jan Egeland, responsable des opérations d'urgence au sein de l'Onu. "Le tsunami a servi de prise de conscience pour nous tous", a-t-il ajouté. Salvano Briceno, responsable de la prévention des catastrophes naturelles pour l'Onu, a précisé que les participants à la conférence de Kobe s'étaient engagés à verser huit millions de dollars pour ce système d'alerte dans l'océan Indien.

REDUIRE DE MOITIE LE NOMBRE DES VICTIMES - Mais certains délégués estiment en le déplorant que la catastrophe asiatique a d'une certaine manière détourné l'attention de ce qui devait être au centre de cette conférence organisée sous l'égide l'Onu: convaincre les pays riches d'investir en amont de petites sommes pour réduire les bilans des catastrophes naturelles. Le communiqué final souligne que les participants se sont engagés sur différents points: le renforcement de la coopération sur l'élaboration de cartes des zones à risque, l'utilisation de satellites pour les systèmes d'alerte et le développement de programmes de sensibilisation des populations des zones à risque. Egeland a formulé l'espoir d'une réduction de moitié du nombre des victimes des catastrophes naturelles au cours de la prochaine décennie. Environ 600.000 personnes sont mortes dans des catastrophes naturelles au cours de la décennie écoulée. "Je pense que c'est réalisable", a estimé Egeland. "Nous recensons chaque jour des milliers de morts supplémentaires à la suite du tsunami. Ces vies, pour la plupart, auraient pu être sauvées si nous avions disposé du système d'alerte." D'après certains délégués, la rédaction du communiqué final a été compliquée par des désaccords sur les mesures concrètes à exiger des gouvernements et sur leurs engagements financiers.

DECEPTION DES ONG - Les organisations humanitaires ont salué la création d'un système d'alerte aux tsunamis dans l'océan Indien mais elles ont fait part de leur déception sur l'absence de mesures concrètes pour contraindre les participants à respecter les objectifs qu'ils se sont fixés. "On peut s'interroger sur le fait de savoir si cette conférence et ses conclusions font honneur à ceux qui sont morts dans le séisme et les raz-de-marée en Asie", a réagi Eva von Aïreïch, de la Fédération internationale des sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge. "Ont-ils apporté l'espoir aux survivants et aux autres personnes vulnérables que bientôt le jour viendra où le risque que de telles horreurs se produisent à nouveau aura été réduit au minimum?", a-t-elle ajouté dans un communiqué. Des divergences sont même apparues entre participants sur la mise en place du système d'alerte aux tsunamis dans l'océan Indien. Lors d'une session spéciale, jeudi, la France, l'Allemagne, les Etats-Unis et le Japon furent parmi les rares pays à formuler des propositions conjointes tandis que l'Inde soumettait son propre projet. Pour certains, cette concurrence masque mal les ambitions et motivations politiques de ces pays. L'Onu dément toute rivalité entre nations et soutient qu'elle continuera de coordonner le processus dans les semaines et les mois à venir pour s'assurer du succès de l'entreprise.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Le Monde
AUTHOR: Philippe Pons

DATE: 22 January

La conférence de Kobé s'achève dans la dissension

KOBE -- La Conférence mondiale sur la prévention des catastrophes naturelles, qui s'est achevée à Kobé samedi 22 janvier, n'a pas eu les résultats concrets attendus. En dépit du caractère d'urgence du problème, tragiquement mis en évidence par le raz de marée dans l'océan Indien, la substance des débats s'est perdue dans les sables des formulations générales. Dans le "cadre d'actions" pour 2005-2015, arrêté à l'issue de la conférence, les participants se sont engagés à mettre à la disposition des uns et des autres leur expertise et leurs technologies en matière de prévention des désastres, mais ils ne se sont fixé aucun objectif précis. Il restera aux organismes des Nations unies chargés de gérer le processus à donner la cohérence d'un projet à la multitude de propositions concurrentes qui ont été faites. Une idée-force a néanmoins fait son chemin : la nécessité d'intégrer la prévention des désastres à la lutte contre la pauvreté. Tous les participants étaient d'accord sur la nécessité d'une prise de conscience des risques de calamités naturelles et de la mise en place de parades. Cela a été attesté par l'annonce, au milieu de la conférence, de la création d'un système d'alerte aux diverses formes de désastres naturels placé sous l'égide des Nations unies ; l'un de ses éléments sera la mise en place d'ici un an d'un système régional d'alerte au tsunami dans l'océan Indien. Mais chaque participant (Etat ou organisation internationale) a en même temps défendu bec et ongles ses propositions ou son pré carré. Tout en étant d'accord pour confier aux Nations unies la conduite du processus, chacun voulait faire de sa propre expertise la cheville ouvrière de la politique à mettre en œuvre. Les pays avancés en matière de prévention (Japon, Etats-Unis, Allemagne et Australie) se heurtant aux susceptibilités des pays asiatiques (Inde, Chine mais aussi Indonésie et Thaïlande) qui mettent en avant leur propre expertise. "Je pense que nous parviendrons à une entente lorsque nous entrerons dans le détail des propositions", commente Salvano Briceno, responsable de la stratégie internationale de l'ONU sur la prévention des désastres. L'imprécision de la déclaration finale tient, estime-t-il, aux difficultés à faire le tri immédiat des points de vue, à les harmoniser et à les intégrer à un projet global. "Une coordination en réseau de propositions concurrentes est possible mais elle nécessite du temps", dit-il. Des conférences régionales commencent dès la semaine prochaine : à Phuket au niveau ministériel, puis à Pékin entre experts. D'autres réunions sont prévues sous l'égide de l'Unesco. La définition d'orientations précises prendra au moins un an. En coulisses, des débats se sont éternisés sur la source des financements affectés à la prévention des désastres. Proviendront-ils du secteur humanitaire ou de l'aide au développement ? Le programme mondial des Nations unies pour le développement (PNUD) milite pour une intégration des actions de prévention à la seconde. En début de conférence, Jan Egeland, le secrétaire général adjoint de l'ONU aux affaires humanitaires, avait proposé que "10 % des fonds débloqués pour l'aide d'urgence soient alloués aux mesures de prévention des risques". Autre controverse : les Etats-Unis voulaient supprimer toute référence au "changement climatique" du projet de déclaration finale élaboré par les Européens. Une insistance reflétant l'opposition de Washington au protocole de Kyoto qui oblige les 129 pays l'ayant ratifié à réduire leurs émissions de gaz à effet de serre. Après d'âpres discussions, le nombre des mentions des phénomènes climatiques a été réduit : dispute dérisoire au regard des enjeux et alors que, comme l'a rappelé Michel Jarraud, secrétaire général de l'Organisation météorologique mondiale, les changements climatiques pourraient entraîner une augmentation en intensité et en fréquence des dangers naturels.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press (French Service)

AUTHOR: Joseph Coleman

DATE: 22 January

A Hawaï, dans 75% des alertes, aucun tsunami n'atteint l'île

KOBE -- L'Etat américain de Hawaï est l'un des mieux préparés aux tsunamis: en cas d'alerte, des sirènes se déclenchent sur les plages et des messages sont diffusés à la télévision. De même, des plans d'évacuation ont été imprimés sur les annuaires téléphoniques, afin de diriger la population en zone surélevée. Mais dans 75% des cas, il s'agit de fausses alertes et aucun raz-de-marée dangereux n'atteint la côte. Ce constat a fait l'objet d'une attention accrue cette semaine lors de la conférence des Nations unies sur la prévention des catastrophes naturelles à Kobé, au Japon, au cours de laquelle a été adopté un plan d'action, sans engagement formel, sur la prévention des catastrophes naturelles. »C'est sans aucun doute un de nos plus grands défis», reconnaît Charles McCreery, qui dirige le centre de prévention des tsunamis dans le Pacifique, créé en 1965 et dont le siège se trouve à Honolulu. On y enregistre l'activité sismique et, en cas d'alerte, des bulletins sont adressés à 26 pays de la région. En plus des fausses alertes, d'autres facteurs entrent en ligne de compte comme une importante disparité dans la capacité des pays du Pacifique à répondre aux alertes, et la nécessité de réorganiser le système avec de nouvelles technologies. «On doit reprendre ce modèle et le mettre à jour», observe Eddie Bernard, directeur de l'Administration nationale américaine de l'atmosphère et des océans (NOAA). Selon les experts, qui rappellent que les systèmes de surveillance n'ont jamais été aussi efficaces, un tsunami majeur dans le Pacifique ne pourra être manqué. Mais le taux élevé de fausses alertes nuit à leur efficacité. Par ailleurs, la question financière se pose. Une évacuation inutile organisée en 1994 à Hawaï avait coûté la bagatelle de 30 millions de dollars (23 millions d'euros). Le système d'alerte utilise des capteurs qui enregistrent la moindre activité sismique. Ils peuvent alors prévenir les pays concernés dans les minutes qui suivent un important séisme. La magnitude du tremblement de terre peut être actualisée une heure après la catastrophe. Mais seul un faible pourcentage des séismes sous-marins entraîne des raz-de-marée dangereux. Or, l'arrivée de cette information peut mettre plusieurs heures. Avec un séisme d'une magnitude 9, comme celui du 26 décembre dernier au large de l'île indonésienne de Sumatra, le tsunami est quasiment inévitable. Mais il est difficile de prédire un raz-de-marée après des tremblements de terre moins puissants. En réalité, tout dépend du type de la secousse tellurique, les séismes qui déplacent l'eau verticalement étant les plus dangereux. Les dernières technologies permettent aux scientifiques de mesurer les déformations de la planète avec des satellites, notamment radar. Les sismologues espèrent utiliser ces mesures pour surveiller le mouvement des plaques tectoniques et peut-être permettre -un jour- de prédire l'imminence d'un tremblement de terre. Mais tout système d'alerte devient inutile lorsque l'épicentre du séisme est situé à proximité de la côte: il est alors trop tard pour alerter la population, d'où la nécessité d'apprendre aux habitants à reconnaître les signes avant-coureurs du tsunami. »L'éducation sauve des vies. Aucune système ne vous parviendra en cinq minutes», conclut Eddie Bernard.

END ITEM

SPANISH LANGUAGE

MEDIUM: EFE (Spanish News Agency)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 17 January

Comisión Europea destinará 360.000 euros a la reducción de desastres

MADRID -- La Comisión Europea aportará 360.000 euros en la Conferencia Mundial para la Reducción de Desastres que se celebrará esta semana en la ciudad japonesa de Kobe, según informó este lunes el Ejecutivo comunitario. La cita, auspiciada por Naciones Unidas, reunirá entre mañana y el próximo 22 de enero a miles de representantes nacionales, expertos y científicos de todo el mundo, que debatirán sobre las medidas para reducir el impacto de las catástrofes naturales, como el reciente "tsunami" asiático. Los fondos, que se canalizarán a través de la Oficina de Ayuda Humanitaria de la Comisión Europea (ECHO), servirán entre otros fines para la presentación en la conferencia de 24 casos de buenas prácticas en la reducción de los desastres en el mundo, indica la nota. "La Comisión Europea está firmemente comprometida en el apoyo de un sistema de alerta global para prevenir las catástrofes como los 'tsunamis', los terremotos y los ciclones", indicó en un comunicado el comisario europeo de Ayuda Humanitaria, Louis Michel. Por su parte, la comisaria europea de Asuntos Exteriores, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, añadió que Bruselas respalda a la ONU "en sus esfuerzos por movilizar y coordinar la acción de la comunidad internacional en la reducción de los riesgos de desastre en la próxima década". Según la Comisión, las prioridades en la reducción de los desastres incluyen la necesidad de desarrollar sistemas de alerta temprana, así como preparar a la población vulnerable, contar con procedimientos de evacuación efectivos y formar a las comunidades en la manera de responder en estos casos. El encuentro en Kobe incluye tres sesiones: una sobre la educación para salvar vidas en caso de catástrofes naturales, otra sobre la gestión de riesgos del patrimonio cultural y una tercera sobre iniciativas mundiales para mejorar los conocimientos en materia de inundaciones y movimientos de tierras.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: EFE

AUTHOR:

DATE: 18 January

UNESCO estudiará crear sistema de prevención de maremotos

PARIS - La creación de un sistema de alerta de maremotos en el océano Índico será objeto de una sesión especial en la Conferencia Mundial de la ONU sobre la Reducción de los Desastres Naturales, que comienza mañana en Kobe (Japón), anunció hoy la UNESCO. La Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura (UNESCO) y la Agencia Meteorológica del Japón (JMA), coorganizadores de la sesión, reunirán en ella a los interlocutores institucionales, organismos especializados y países donantes que ofrecieron su ayuda para crear dicho sistema de alerta temprana. La reunión servirá para examinar el plan básico para el establecimiento de un mecanismo de este tipo en el Océano Índico y de un marco de coordinación que garantice una cooperación eficaz

entre las partes interesadas en la instalación de ese sistema, agregó la UNESCO. Tiene, igualmente, por objeto, lograr un uso eficiente de los recursos disponibles y evitar la duplicación de esfuerzos, destacó. La UNESCO prevé la puesta en marcha de un sistema de alerta temprana en la región del Océano Índico en junio de 2006 y de uno mundial operativo a partir de 2007. Eso requerirá "una transferencia acelerada" de la experiencia y los conocimientos acumulados gracias al funcionamiento del sistema de alerta temprana contra los maremotos establecido en la región del Pacífico, en 1965, por iniciativa de la Comisión Oceanográfica Intergubernamental (COI) de la UNESCO, precisó la Organización. En el océano Índico, la infraestructura científica necesaria, consistente en el emplazamiento de boyas en aguas profundas, la instalación de mareógrafos y la creación de un centro regional de alerta contra los maremotos tiene un coste estimado de unos 30 millones de dólares. Además, los costes anuales de mantenimiento de ese sistema regional ascenderían probablemente a uno o dos millones de dólares, sin contar con los gastos de cada país para establecer y mantener dicho sistema, según indicó el director general de la UNESCO, Koichiro Matsuura, el pasado 12 de enero. Al intervenir en la Reunión Internacional sobre Pequeños Estados Insulares en Desarrollo, celebrada en Mauricio, Matsuura destacó entonces la importancia que reviste la cooperación a la hora de emprender un proyecto de este tipo. Por ello, precisó, la UNESCO prevé trabajar en estrecho contacto con sus principales interlocutores institucionales, como la Organización Meteorológica Mundial (OMM) de la ONU, los países donantes de fondos y las autoridades nacionales de los países interesados. También en Kobe, la UNESCO organizará otras tres sesiones sobre "la educación para el desarrollo sostenible: hacia una reducción eficaz de los desastres naturales y un aumento de la seguridad humana" ; "la gestión de los riesgos que ponen en peligro el patrimonio cultural" y "las nuevas iniciativas internacionales relativas a la investigación sobre inundaciones y desprendimientos de tierras y la mitigación de sus riesgos". Asimismo, presentará un informe elaborado en cooperación con la Universidad de Kioto sobre "Reducción de desastres y seguridad humana: educación para el desarrollo sostenible. Estudios de casos y prácticas ejemplares". La UNESCO posee una amplia experiencia en el campo de la reducción de los desastres naturales y promueve numerosos programas relacionados con el estudio de las catástrofes, terremotos, erupciones volcánicas, desprendimientos de tierras, inundaciones, maremotos y la mitigación de sus consecuencias, destacó la organización en un comunicado. Todo ello tiene el objetivo de fomentar un mejor conocimiento de los peligros naturales y contribuir al establecimiento de observatorios y redes sismológicas fiables y de sistemas fidedignos de alerta temprana contra erupciones volcánicas y maremotos. La UNESCO pretende, igualmente, impulsar la adopción de proyectos de construcción adecuados, proteger los edificios destinados a actividades educativas y los monumentos culturales, incrementar la protección del medio ambiente para prevenir los desastres naturales, preparar y sensibilizar mejor al público a los desastres naturales mediante actividades de educación, formación, comunicación e información y fomentar las investigaciones científicas y técnicas en las situaciones posteriores a este tipo de desastres.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: BBC (Spanish Service)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 18 January

Maremoto: piden aprender la lección

Con un llamado los líderes mundiales para que aprendan de las lecciones del maremoto del mes pasado en el Océano Índico, comenzó en Kobe, Japón, una conferencia internacional sobre desastres naturales. La reunión coincide con el décimo aniversario del terremoto que sacudió a la ciudad anfitriona y dejó más de 6.400 muertos. Sin embargo, se espera que los delegados se concentren en el maremoto ocurrido el 26 de diciembre pasado, que tuvo su epicentro frente a la costa de Indonesia y cobró más de 160.000 víctimas fatales en 12 países. El coordinador de las Naciones Unidas para la Asistencia Humanitaria, Jan Egeland, instó a proteger mejor a las comunidades pobres y más vulnerables. Se espera que los 3.000 delegados reunidos en Kobe discutan formas de poner en práctica un sistema de alerta temprana de tsunamis en el Océano Índico, similar al que ya existe en el Pacífico. Los expertos sostienen que si un dispositivo así hubiera estado en funciones en el sudeste de Asia, podrían haberse salvado innumerables vidas. "La mejor manera de honrar a los muertos es proteger a los vivos, dijo Egeland en la apertura de la reunión. Prevención - El corresponsal de la BBC en Kobe, Charles Scanlon, dijo que los delegados saben perfectamente que la tecnología por sí sola no es suficiente para mitigar el impacto de futuros desastres. Funcionarios de la ONU afirman que debe ponerse el énfasis en las comunidades, de modo que los alertas sean efectivos en el nivel local. En la reunión se ha discutido la necesidad de enseñar procedimientos de emergencia a los niños, mientras que hospitales, escuelas y centros de salud deben organizarse adecuadamente para hacer frente a sismos e inundaciones. En un informe difundido en la víspera de la conferencia en Kobe, la ONU señaló que al menos 2.500 millones de personas han sido afectadas por desastres naturales en los últimos 10 años, lo que significa un incremento del 60% en relación con la década anterior. Según el reporte, las inundaciones y los terremotos han sido los fenómenos más letales, ya que cobraron más de la mitad de las víctimas. En ese mismo periodo, Asia ha sido el continente más afectado por desastres naturales, con más de la mitad de las muertes y más del 90% de heridos y personas que perdieron sus hogares o necesitaron asistencia de emergencia. Estas cifras registraron su nivel más elevado en 2002, con millones afectados por inundaciones en Asia y por sequías en India, Etiopía y Zimbabue.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: El Mundo (Spain)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 18 January

CONFERENCIA INTERNACIONAL DE LA ONU SOBRE REDUCCIÓN DE CATÁSTROFES

MADRID -- Reducción de riesgos y sistemas de alerta temprana. Estas serán las palabras claves en la Conferencia Mundial sobre la Reducción de Desastres de Naciones Unidas, que se celebra hasta el próximo día 22 en la ciudad japonesa de Kobe, menos de un mes después del tsunami que ha dejado más de 150.000 víctimas mortales y siete millones de damnificados en el sudeste asiático. Los desastres causan una media de 184 muertes al día y, entre 1980 y 2000, más de 1,5 millones de personas perdieron la vida como consecuencia de éstos. Cada año, más de 200 millones de personas se ven afectadas por los desastres naturales. Más de 3.000 expertos de 150 países, 50 ONG, representantes nacionales, expertos y científicos de todo el mundo debatirán sobre las medidas más convenientes a poner en marcha durante el próximo decenio, para reducir el riesgo y la vulnerabilidad ante las catástrofes. Entre estas iniciativas figura la necesidad de desarrollar sistemas de alerta temprana, habilitar procedimientos de evacuación inmediata y formar a las

poblaciones más vulnerables para que sepan cómo actuar ante un desastre. La conferencia incluye tres sesiones: una sobre la educación para salvar vidas en caso de catástrofes naturales, otra sobre la gestión de riesgos del patrimonio cultural y una tercera sobre iniciativas mundiales para mejorar los conocimientos sobre inundaciones y seísmos. Desastre y subdesarrollo - La ONG española Ayuda en Acción participará en esta cita con una ponencia sobre gobernabilidad y catástrofes, centrada en la reducción del riesgo de la población pobre y excluida. En su opinión, en los últimos años, se ha empezado a reconocer la relación entre catástrofes y subdesarrollo. Así, la ONU ha alertado de la dificultad de cumplir con los Objetivos de Desarrollo del Milenio como consecuencia de las pérdidas ocasionadas por los desastres y las catástrofes. Además, afirma que están surgiendo nuevos factores que agravan la vulnerabilidad de las comunidades a las amenazas naturales tales como el sida, la violencia y los conflictos que provocan crisis humanas, especialmente en África subsahariana. La ciudad de Kobe se ha convertido en el símbolo de la recuperación de un seísmo, cuando se cumplen 10 años del Gran Terremoto de Hanshin que dejó 6.400 muertos, y ha puesto esa experiencia al servicio de la prevención de desastres.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: El Mundo (Spain)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 18 January

Japón propone crear una base de datos de Naciones Unidas para intentar evitar los desastres naturales

KOBE -- El primer ministro japonés, Junichiro Koizumi, ha propuesto la creación de una base de datos de Naciones Unidas sobre desastres, así como el entrenamiento de expertos en estas situaciones en los países en vías de desarrollo, para intentar reducir este tipo de catástrofes. Koizumi precisó que esta base incluye "las mejores lecciones que el mundo ha aprendido de otros desastres", durante su intervención en la Conferencia de Naciones Unidas para la Reducción de los Desastres Naturales, que se celebra en la ciudad japonesa de Kobe. Además, afirma que la base está diseñada para que la comunidad internacional comparta datos sobre tecnologías útiles en el pasado y otras que necesitan investigación y desarrollo. Sistema de alerta de tsunamis - El primer ministro ha reiterado la necesidad de construir un sistema global de alerta temprana de tsunamis en el Océano Índico, en vista de las devastadoras consecuencias de los maremotos que asolaron las zonas costeras de la región el 26 de diciembre y que han dejado 170.000 muertos y miles de desaparecidos. "Con estos mecanismos será posible salvar muchas vidas en caso de que se desaten nuevos tsunamis en el Indico", ha indicado Koizumi, tras ofrecer ayuda tanto a nivel bilateral con los países de la zona, como colaboración con agencias internacionales o con la UNESCO. Las autoridades niponas emplearán su ayuda oficial al desarrollo para promover los esfuerzos que están realizando los países en vías de desarrollo para prevenir este tipo de desastres. Además, formarán personal especializado en los el sudeste asiático, la zona del mundo "más castigada" por los desastres, según Koizumi.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: RPP Internet News Service (Peru)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 18 January

Perú presente en Conferencia Mundial sobre desastres en Japón

Hasta el 22 del presente, la ciudad de Kobe en Japón será la sede de la Segunda Conferencia Mundial sobre Reducción de Desastres, convocado por la Organización de Naciones Unidas a través de la Secretaría de la Estrategia Internacional para la Reducción de Desastres. La conferencia tiene por objetivo elevar la conciencia mundial y establecer un compromiso político para la reducción de desastres en un contexto de desarrollo sostenible y erradicación de la pobreza en el periodo 2005 – 2015. Además compartir el conocimiento y experiencias relacionadas a la temática de los desastres e incrementar la confiabilidad y disponibilidad de información relacionada a la reducción de desastres. La delegación peruana está presidida por el Jefe de Instituto Nacional de Defensa Civil (INDECI), Contralmirante (r) Juan Luis Podestá Llosa e integrado por representantes del Ministerio de Salud, Universidad Nacional de Ingeniería y el Colegio de Ingenieros del Perú; instituciones que forman parte del Sistema Nacional de Defensa Civil. En dicha reunión mundial, el Perú que ejerce la presidencia del Comité Andino para la Prevención y Atención de Desastres (CAPRADE), que integran también Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela y Bolivia, dará a conocer la visión andina y la posición del CAPRADE sobre la cita de Kobe. Durante la posterior reunión de coordinación que involucró a los países andinos, latinoamericanos y el caribe, desarrollada en Quito, se formuló una posición conjunta que incorpora los elementos más importantes de la posición peruana y de los países andinos en su conjunto, derivadas de la Estrategia Andina para la Prevención y Atención de Desastres, en la que se definen políticas y ejes temáticos orientados a la reducción del riesgo de desastres y del impacto de los fenómenos naturales y antrópicos en nuestra región, contrastándolos con las vulnerabilidades existentes. Cabe recordar, que en la II Conferencia Preparatoria de la reunión mundial, realizada en la ciudad de Ginebra en Suiza, se plantearon los lineamientos y postulados que conforman las pautas del documento de negociación que se acordará en la Conferencia Mundial sobre Reducción de Desastres de Kobe, Japón.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Reuters (Spanish Service)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 18 January

ENTREVISTA-La ONU necesita impulsar prevención futuros desastres

LONDRES -- Los gobiernos necesitan promover la creación de un pequeño grupo anti-desastres de la ONU que tenga poco personal y un pequeño presupuesto para que pueda trabajar mejor a la hora de prevenir catástrofes como la causada por el tsunami asiático, dijo el lunes un ministro británico. El ministro de Desarrollo Internacional, Gareth Thomas, dijo que las olas gigantes que golpearon a naciones del océano Índico el 26 de diciembre y mataron a más de 175.000 personas habían puesto en evidencia fallos fundamentales en las estructuras de la ONU para reducir los riesgos de los desastres. "Este desastre es una llamada de atención para la comunidad internacional. La reducción del riesgo de desastre ha sido descuidada en la lucha contra la pobreza", dijo Thomas a Reuters en una entrevista. El ministro añadió que los métodos de prevención de catástrofes y la gestión de las secuelas no necesitaban siquiera de la participación de la tecnología avanzada. Además, habló de la necesidad de construir comunidades alejadas de las zonas vulnerables hasta reforzar los edificios y almacenar los suministros de emergencia tales como tiendas, material médico y utensilios de cocina para que no tuvieran que ser

aerotransportados. "Hay sistemas de alerta previa que pueden ponerse en práctica - incluso hasta gente con bicicletas y con silbatos", dijo el miembro del Gobierno británico. "El problema es que esto no ha sido una prioridad ni para los países en desarrollo ni para las agencias de ayuda humanitaria ni para los donantes. Necesitamos que la ONU establezca más prioridades", añadió. Thomas declaró que la llave está en la Estrategia Internacional para la Reducción de Desastres (ISDR, en sus siglas inglesas) - un pequeño grupo dentro de la OCHA, la agencia de asuntos humanitarios de la ONU. Pero su personal era de tan sólo 20 personas y su presupuesto de ocho millones de dólares, dijo. "Eso demuestra la baja intensidad de ese organismo en este momento. Necesita recursos adicionales significativos tanto en personal como en dinero", dijo. El trabajo de ISDR es conseguir que los gobiernos de los países en desarrollo le den la máxima prioridad a la planificación de los desastres, además de asegurarse que las agencias humanitarias y los países donantes también lo hacen. Una conferencia internacional en Kobe, Japón, el martes, para abordar la forma de mejorar la planificación de las catástrofes a nivel mundial, ha cobrado un mayor ímpetu a causa del tsunami. "Si hacemos progresos esta semana será una de las consecuencias positivas del tsunami", dijo Thomas. "Ahora hay que reforzar la ISDR - dotándolo de más dinero y atención - y esperamos utilizar la conferencia para darle ese impulso".

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Swiss Info (Spanish Service)

AUTHOR: Anna Nelson

DATE: 18 January

Cumbre mundial para prevenir catástrofes

La Conferencia Mundial sobre Reducción de Desastres se celebra en la ciudad nipona de Kobe, sacudida por un devastador terremoto en enero de 1995. "Lo que queremos es conocer mejor el cambio en la relación que existe entre los desastres naturales y la población cultural en los diferentes países", afirmó Marco Ferrari, miembro de la delegación suiza en Kobe. "Para ello se necesita integrar a la población, a las autoridades locales y federales, así como a los científicos y las compañías aseguradoras, en un discurso vinculante sobre la reducción de los riesgos", declaró a swissinfo. "Sólo así muchos países podrán avanzar en la creación de sistemas de control y alerta". Alerta precoz - El objetivo de la conferencia de Kobe es elaborar una estrategia y un plan de acción para los próximos diez años para limitar el riesgo de desastres naturales, como los terremotos, inundaciones y sequías, a escala mundial. Según el coordinador de las operaciones de socorro de Naciones Unidas, Jan Egeland, este tipo de catástrofes causan tantas o incluso más víctimas que los conflictos armados. Pero a diferencia de las guerras y los combates, a menudo las catástrofes naturales sí son previsibles. "Creemos que existen medios para preparar a las comunidades y a los individuos a enfrentar estas situaciones de emergencia", señaló Egeland. Las conversaciones en Kobe se centrarán principalmente en cómo reconstruir las regiones y poblaciones sacudidas por desastres como el que se produjo el pasado 26 de diciembre en el sudeste asiático. El maremoto se cobró al menos 150.000 vidas y dejó a unos cinco millones de personas sin acceso a los servicios más básicos. La reunión se convocó mucho antes de que se produjera el siniestro. Según Ferrari, la tragedia pone de relieve que la falta de sistemas de alerta y previsión puede ser una cuestión de vida o de muerte. "Seguirán produciéndose desastres naturales, terremotos, y las consecuencias serán terribles", declaró. "Pero esperamos que el tsunami sirva para

reflexionar sobre lo que se hubiera podido hacer y lo que se tiene que hacer para evitar tantas pérdidas humanas". "No es sencillamente el error de los países afectados", agregó. "Todos tienen que asumir su responsabilidad en la reducción de los riesgos, y especialmente la comunidad internacional". Regiones montañosas peligrosas - La vulnerabilidad de las islas y las regiones costeras será previsiblemente un tema central, aunque Suiza pretende acaparar la atención también sobre los riesgos de catástrofes naturales en las regiones montañosas. La Plataforma Nacional Suiza para los Desastres Naturales (PLANAT) y la Agencia Suiza para el Desarrollo y la Cooperación (COSUDE) realizarán una presentación temática basada en la amplia experiencia que tiene el país alpino en el manejo de desastres en las montañas, como son las avalanchas y los deslizamientos de tierra. Para explicar la política de prevención y acción de Suiza, ese taller tomará como ejemplo el cantón del Valais. Los peligros naturales son numerosos y muchas catástrofes naturales se han producido en los últimos años. El método suizo está basado en un enfoque "holístico" que incorpora la prevención, la reacción al hecho y la reconstrucción, tanto como el diálogo con los especialistas de socorro y con las poblaciones afectadas. Un elemento clave de este taller será recalcar las relaciones de Suiza con otros países y la importancia de compartir las informaciones. "Si se trata de avalanchas, deshielo de glaciares o de inundaciones, Suiza tiene mucha experiencia para compartir", señaló Marco Ferrari. "Este tipo de talleres nos permitirá también conocer las experiencias de otros y de traer conocimientos útiles al país", concluyó el delegado suizo en la Conferencia de Kobe.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: El Comercio (Ecuador)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January

Kobe: 150 países en la próxima cita mundial

Con la intención de mostrar que aprendió la lección del maremoto del 26 de diciembre en Asia, la ONU se movilizó ayer en Kobe para prevenir mejor las catástrofes naturales y financiar con más generosidad las operaciones de auxilio y reconstrucción. El Discurso Inicial. Unos 4 000 científicos y responsables de más de 150 países se reunieron en el gran puerto japonés, devastado hace diez años por un violento terremoto, para una conferencia mundial sobre la prevención de desastres naturales. Al abrir la conferencia, el subsecretario general para los asuntos humanitarios de la ONU, el noruego Jan Egeland, propuso que "por lo menos el 10 por ciento de las enormes sumas giradas a favor de las operaciones de auxilio en el mundo sea consagrado a la prevención de desastres". En un mensaje, el secretario general, Kofi Annan deseó que la cita ayude "a las comunidades, naciones y ciudadanos frente a las catástrofes naturales y a movilizar los recursos y proteger a las poblaciones". Como estaba previsto, el primer ministro japonés, Junichiro Koizumi, propuso la creación, en Kobe, de un centro mundial de peligros asociados al agua y un banco de datos sobre las experiencias recogidas en las catástrofes. La conferencia, prevista hace tiempo y que terminará el sábado, cobró nueva dimensión tras el maremoto que devastó las costas del océano Índico: más de 168 000 muertos. Además de los balances y trabajos sobre diferentes riesgos naturales, en ocasión del décimo aniversario del sismo de Kobe (6 433 muertos), los participantes analizarán la implementación de un sistema de alerta de 'tsunami' antes de junio del 2006 en el Índico y de junio del 2007 a nivel mundial.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Clarin (Argentina)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January

La ONU creará un sistema mundial de alerta de catástrofes naturales

La Organización de las Naciones Unidas anunció hoy la decisión de crear un sistema mundial de alerta de catástrofes naturales. El anuncio se realizó en el marco de la Conferencia Mundial sobre Prevención de las Catástrofes Naturales que se está desarrollando desde ayer en Kobe, Japón. Los expertos que participan de la cumbre se pronunciaron en una declaración conjunta por la creación de un sistema de alerta, que sea capaz de reducir el impacto de las catástrofes naturales. "Millones de personas en el mundo deben la vida a la creación de estos sistemas de alarma. El nuevo programa aportará tranquilidad y seguridad", declaró Salvano Briceno, director de la Agencia de la ONU para la Elaboración de las Estrategias para la Reducción de los Efectos de las Catástrofes Naturales. Ayer, durante la ceremonia de apertura de la cumbre, el Coordinador de Asuntos Humanitarios de la ONU, Jan Egeland, afirmó que "no se puede perder más tiempo para hacer más seguros a los pueblos, ya que los terremotos, tsunamis y otras catástrofes se cobran la vida de decenas de millones de personas cada año". "La reducción de riesgos de desastre no es un costo adicional, sino una inversión esencial en nuestro futuro común. Hay costos que debemos asumir hoy para obtener mejores resultados mañana", añadió. Egeland insistió además en la obligación, tanto económica como moral, de colaborar en la detección temprana de los desastres meteorológicos tanto en zonas con riesgo sísmico como en cualquier área costera, sobre todo en las áreas con menos infraestructura, que son las más afectadas. El funcionario sostuvo que los esfuerzos para reducir los efectos de los desastres naturales no son sólo una oportunidad y una inversión, sino un imperativo moral.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: AFP (Spanish Service)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 19 January

Habrá sistema mundial de alerta de catástrofes

Naciones Unidas anunció hoy su decisión de crear un sistema mundial de alerta de catástrofes naturales, en la conferencia que se celebra en la ciudad japonesa de Kobe, dedicada al estudio de este tipo de problemas. Alemania, Japón, Australia y Estados Unidos han presentado propuestas para construir un sistema de alerta a los maremotos. No obstante, esta decisión debe ser concretada tras la lluvia de propuestas recibidas a raíz del maremoto del sureste asiático, el 26 de diciembre, que ha dejado cerca de 170.000 muertos. Los expertos de la Conferencia Mundial sobre la Prevención de Catástrofes, que se celebra en Kobe (oeste de Japón) en la que se dan cita instituciones como la Organización Meteorológica Mundial y la Unesco, se manifestaron a favor de un sistema de alerta precoz para reducir el impacto de los desastres, en una declaración conjunta. "Este nuevo programa dará seguridad y tranquilidad. Millones de personas en todo el mundo deben la vida y su sustento a sistemas de alerta eficaces", declaró Salvano Briceno, director de la agencia de la ONU para la elaboración de Estrategias para la Reducción de Catástrofes Naturales. Este anuncio es sobre todo muy simbólico, pues todavía hay

que decidir el tipo de sistema que se quiere. "Es cada vez más claro que necesitamos un sistema de alerta multidesastres precoz que debería representar una nueva manera de pensar", declaró Klaus Töpfer, director del Programa del Medio Ambiente de Naciones Unidas. Ahora tenemos muchas propuestas descoordinadas de los países. Lo que necesitamos, es coordinarlas", declaró a la prensa Patricio Bernal, director de la Comisión Oceanográfica Intergubernamental de la Unesco. Bernal indicó que su grupo desea organizar dos conferencias en los próximos dos meses, una de ellas en París, en marzo. Espera que estas reuniones permitan determinar el tipo de tecnología a utilizar, aunque la decisión podría ser adoptada en una reunión de su comisión en julio, para que el sistema pueda estar operacional a mediados de mayo del 2006.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: BBC (Spanish Service)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 20 January

Maremoto: urgen sistema de alerta

Los países donantes y las naciones afectadas por el maremoto en el sudeste de Asia instaron a las Naciones Unidas a comenzar inmediatamente los trabajos para establecer un sistema de alerta temprana de tsunamis en el Océano Índico. Las agencias de la ONU dijeron, por su parte, que estaban listas para iniciar las obras y que un dispositivo básico podría estar listo dentro de 12 a 18 meses. El llamado se produjo durante la conferencia sobre prevención de desastres en la ciudad japonesa de Kobe. Previamente se informó que la cifra de muertos por el maremoto trepó a 220.000. En su etapa inicial, el proyecto para construir un sistema de alerta temprana estará a cargo de la Unesco y contará con millones de dólares que ya prometieron la Unión Europea, Japón y otros países. Lo que aún debe decidirse es quién contribuirá a qué exactamente, ya que se necesitará una sofisticada red de boyas ancladas en el piso oceánico, vinculadas con un centro de comunicaciones regional. Estados Unidos, Alemania y Australia ya han ofrecido su propia tecnología. Mientras tanto, Japón acordó proveer cobertura con información de sus propios sensores. Vidas - Según el corresponsal de la BBC en Kobe, Charles Scanlon, los delegados en la conferencia reconocieron que decenas de miles de vidas podrían haberse salvado si un dispositivo así hubiera estado en operaciones antes del 26 de diciembre, cuando ocurrió el maremoto. Sin embargo, funcionarios advirtieron que el mayor desafío está en el nivel local: en cómo comunicar los alertas a comunidades costeras aisladas. "Los sistemas de prevención sólo pueden tener éxito si la población en mayor riesgo puede recibir y actuar al encenderse la luz de alarma", dijo Ian Wilderspin, representante de la Federación Internacional de la Cruz Roja y la Media Luna Roja. Entre tanto, organizaciones de ayuda en la provincia Indonesia de Aceh, la zona más afectada por el maremoto, aseguraron que no han tenido mayores problemas para distribuir suministros, a pesar de las regulaciones impuestas por el gobierno, que limitan la movilización de estos grupos. Indonesia exigió a los socorristas registrarse para viajar fuera de Banda Aceh, la capital provincial, y Meulaboh, debido a la inseguridad en la zona.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: El Mundo (Spain)

Author:

Date: 20 January

El PAM advierte de que el hambre crónica 'también es una emergencia'

KOBE (JAPÓN).- El director del Programa Mundial de Alimentos (PAM), James Morris, ha advertido de que "el hambre y la desnutrición crónica también son una emergencia", aunque no atraen la atención de los medios de comunicación como desastres naturales como el ocurrido en Asia. Morris, que ha participado en Kobe (Japón) en la Conferencia Internacional sobre la Reducción de Desastres organizada por la ONU, ha querido lanzar "una voz de advertencia" durante su intervención. "El hambre crónica y la desnutrición que afectan a 300 millones de niños en todo el mundo no crea la dramática cobertura mediática de un tsunami pero causa mucho más sufrimiento", ha denunciado. Por lo que ha pedido que "no se pierda de vista este dato. Esto también es una emergencia". Sólo una de cada diez personas que muere de hambre o enfermedades relacionadas con ella lo hace en el marco de una guerra o de un desastre natural, según afirma la ONU. Cada semana, el mismo número de personas que perdieron su vida por los maremotos (220.000, según las últimas estimaciones) en su mayoría niños, fallece como consecuencia del hambre o de enfermedades relacionadas. Estas personas, "mueren en silencio en comunidades devastadas por la pobreza sin atraer la cobertura de los medios internacionales". Por otra parte, ha asegurado que "con la excepcionalmente generosa ayuda de Japón y otros donantes, ninguno de los niños que sobrevivió a la tragedia en Asia morirá de hambre. Los niños sufrieron mucho en este tsunami pero con mejores sistemas de alerta temprana podemos evitar que millones de ellos mueran en el futuro". La catástrofe en Asia "nos ha dado una ilustración gráfica de la importancia de estar preparados para la emergencia y la alerta temprana", ha resaltado Morris. Según el PAM, el número de desastres naturales va en aumento y actualmente un tercio de los 100 millones de personas a los que la agencia presta ayuda son personas víctimas de este tipo de sucesos. El Gobierno de, anfitrión de la conferencia, ha prometido 60 millones de dólares al PAM para sus labores de ayuda tras el tsunami, la mayor donación hasta la fecha.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: BBC (Spanish Service)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 22 January

Maremoto: acuerdan plan de acción

A casi un mes del devastador maremoto en el Océano Índico, una conferencia de la ONU acordó un plan para reducir el número de víctimas y los daños causados por desastres naturales. Los delegados de unos 150 países reunidos en la ciudad japonesa de Kobe también estuvieron de acuerdo en la necesidad de instalar un sistema de alerta temprana de tsunamis en el sur de Asia. Sin embargo, la conferencia de la ONU no logró establecer objetivos específicos ni plazos para instrumentar su plan. Uno de los organizadores del encuentro, Salvano Briceno, de las Naciones Unidas, admitió que el proceso es lento porque deben resolverse muchas diferencias y tomarse en cuenta diversos puntos de vista. Algunos países enfatizaron su preocupación sobre el impacto del calentamiento global, algo que desestimaron Estados Unidos y otras naciones. El maremoto del 26 de diciembre dejó unos 220.000 muertos. La declaración final de la reunión, aprobada este sábado, se expresa en términos generales: "Es crucial que las políticas nacionales den una alta prioridad a la reducción del riesgo de desastres naturales, y esto debe ser consistente con las capacidades de los gobiernos y los recursos disponibles". El

coordinador de las Naciones Unidas para la Asistencia Humanitaria, Jan Egeland, dijo que el documento tiene, sobre todo, un valor simbólico. "Las decisiones de esta conferencia no tienen un carácter vinculante pero sí representan un compromiso moral por parte de los países y las organizaciones", aclaró. Sistema de alerta - Durante el encuentro, los países donantes y las naciones afectadas por el maremoto instaron a las Naciones Unidas a comenzar inmediatamente los trabajos para establecer un sistema de alerta temprana de tsunamis en el Océano Índico. Las agencias de la ONU respondieron que estaban listas para iniciar las obras y que un dispositivo básico podría estar en operaciones dentro de 12 a 18 meses. En su etapa inicial, el proyecto estará a cargo de la Unesco y contará con millones de dólares que prometieron la Unión Europea, Japón y otros países. Estados Unidos, Alemania y Australia ofrecieron su propia tecnología. Mientras tanto, Japón acordó proveer cobertura con información de sus propios sensores. Según el corresponsal de la BBC en Kobe, Charles Scanlon, los delegados en la conferencia reconocieron que decenas de miles de vidas podrían haberse salvado si un dispositivo así hubiera estado en operaciones cuando ocurrió el maremoto. Sin embargo, funcionarios advirtieron que el mayor desafío está en el nivel local: en cómo comunicar los alertas a comunidades costeras aisladas. "Los sistemas de prevención sólo pueden tener éxito si la población en mayor riesgo puede recibir y actuar al encenderse la luz de alarma", dijo Ian Wilderspin, representante de la Federación Internacional de la Cruz Roja y la Media Luna Roja.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: Associated Press (Spanish Service)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 22 January

Conferencia fija creación de sistema de advertencias de 'tsunamis'

Golpeadas por la catástrofe de los maremotos en el Océano Indico, las naciones del mundo acordaron trabajar juntas para prevenir a sus poblaciones. La conferencia de cinco días organizada por la ONU y en la que participaron 168 naciones, finalizó con la adopción de un "marco de acción" destinado a conseguir una "reducción sustancial" de las pérdidas por desastres en los próximos 10 años, aunque no fijó objetivos concretos. Este es uno de los "desafíos más críticos" que enfrenta el mundo, dijo la declaración final, porque los ciclones, inundaciones, terremotos y otros acontecimientos, entorpecen el progreso humano, especialmente en las naciones pobres. Sin embargo, la frustración fue evidente porque los documentos de la conferencia no eran vinculantes, no se comprometió nuevo dinero para reducir los riesgos, ni se fijaron metas firmes para evaluar el progreso. Japón, por ejemplo, había propuesto de fijar una meta para reducir la mitad de las muertes relacionadas con desastres de agua para el año 2015, pero la delegación estadounidense y otras se opusieron a esas ideas. La Cruz Roja Internacional dijo que continuará alentando metas sólidas y más ayuda para que los países pobres puedan prepararse para los desastres naturales. "La comunidad internacional tiene el 2005 para concretar sus promesas", expresó Eva von Oelreich, de esa agencia. El funcionario más importante de las Naciones Unidas, Jan Egeland, dijo que pensaba que el plan de acción de 10 años reducirá la mitad de las víctimas de desastres para el 2015. Pero "no debemos fallar con el desafío de la implementación", advirtió. La conferencia de Kobe, realizada en esta ciudad portuaria japonesa que hace 10 años fue azotada por un terremoto, reunió a 4.000 diplomáticos, especialistas de desarrollo, científicos, economistas y trabajadores de ayuda humanitaria. Se trató de un esfuerzo por canalizar experiencia y recursos para crear mejores defensas humanas contra lo

peor de la naturaleza. En los últimos 10 años, los desastres naturales han matado a por lo menos 700.000 personas, han afectado a más de 2.500 millones y han representado pérdidas económicas de unos 690.000 millones de dólares, de acuerdo con un centro universitario de investigaciones de Bélgica.

END ITEM

MEDIUM: EFE (Spanish News Service)

AUTHOR:

DATE: 23 January

La ONU adopta un plan que da luz verde a la creación de un sistema de alerta de 'tsunamis'

TOKIO -- La Conferencia Internacional de la ONU sobre Reducción de Desastres, que concluyó ayer en Kobe (Japón), adoptó un Plan de Acción que da luz verde a la creación de un sistema de alerta de tsunamis en el Índico antes de junio de 2006. Los delegados y expertos de 168 países reunidos en esa ciudad japonesa, devastada en 1995 por un seísmo que dejó más de 6.400 muertos, se comprometieron ayer a impulsar ante sus Gobiernos ese ambicioso Plan de Acción cuyo objetivo es reducir las pérdidas humanas y materiales por desastres naturales en la próxima década. Los más de 3.000 participantes en la Conferencia culminaron cinco días de trabajos con la Declaración de Hyogo (provincia donde se encuentra Kobe), en la que se afirma que la reducción de los daños por desastres naturales es "uno de los mayores desafíos" a los que ha hecho frente la comunidad internacional. Como muestra de la magnitud del "combate contra los elementos" impulsado en Kobe, los delegados recordaron los efectos del maremoto que el 26 de diciembre pasado causó más de 225.000 muertes en el sur de Asia. La Declaración de Hyogo insta a incentivar una "cultura de prevención de desastres" y urge a los países más amenazados a mejorar su habilidad para afrontar tales tragedias, por sí mismos y mediante la cooperación bilateral e internacional. En la declaración se subraya la importancia de convertir el Plan de Acción 2005-2015 de Hyogo en pasos concretos dirigidos a reducir los riesgos y vulnerabilidad a las catástrofes naturales mediante la cooperación integrada y los mecanismos destinados a compartir información. Ese plan tiene como meta reducir de forma sustancial en los próximos diez años las pérdidas por desastres naturales, desarrollar un sistema internacional de alerta rápida y crear una red mundial de información para este propósito. Ayuda en educación Los ministros de los países de la Unión Europea (UE) decidieron ayer coordinar su ayuda en educación a los países del sudeste asiático afectados por el maremoto y pidieron que las políticas comunitarias de ayuda humanitaria integren la dimensión educativa. "Hemos decidido poner en marcha una coordinación de los programas educativos puestos en marcha en cada país", anunció en conferencia de prensa el ministro de Educación francés, François Fillon, que había sido el promotor de este encuentro excepcional en París. También indicó que se había pedido a la UE que "tenga más en cuenta la dimensión educativa" en el diseño de sus acciones de ayuda humanitaria. Su colega luxemburguesa, Mady Delvaux-Stehres, -cuyo país preside este semestre la Unión- explicó que en el próximo consejo de ministros de Educación del 21 de febrero se hará un listado de las propuestas comunes que se han lanzado para poder dar contenido a la decisión tomada ayer. El comisario europeo de Educación, Jan Figel, destacó que la reunión de ayer es "un signo de compromiso" de la UE, y refiriéndose a los damnificados por el maremoto del 26 de diciembre insistió en que "necesitamos construir la vuelta de esos países a la normal, y la educación es una parte de la respuesta". La titular española de Educación, María Jesús San Segundo, dijo que había propuesto ante sus colegas

européens la réalisation de "un programme de parrainage" de centres scolaires de la région du sinistre qui ont besoin d'aide par ceux du Vieux Continent. Les ministres de l'UE ont réaffirmé leur engagement avec le programme que l'UNICEF va mettre en œuvre pour la reconstruction de centres scolaires.

END ITEM

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