

Civil Society Address to the WCDR

Delivered by Zenida Delica on behalf of civil society organizations, researchers in risk management and disaster response.

Here we are. We all share the grief over the death of so many people killed by the tsunami. We all share the grief of millions of people left behind with their belongings lost. We all share the compassion of the neighbours, the students, the volunteers and the businesses who came out in solidarity to rescue and help. Soon followed by help and moral support from every corner of the world.

We are fortunate to be in a unique meeting that has the power to make disaster preparedness work. We have the responsibility to translate the world's grief and compassion into lasting commitments.

In this conference there are government delegates and representatives from civil society. The translation of the ideals of the conference into political action is the task of the governments, but the responsibility of us all. This statement comes from those of us in civil society who want to see the vision of the conference turned into action that makes a real difference to people, especially the most vulnerable people over the next ten years.

We are almost at the end of the conference. Have we lived up to the expectations of those we represent? Can we go home and look the disaster victims and the people who came to their help in the eyes?

Passionate statements were made in this plenary. New insights exchanged in the thematic sessions. But they have not reached the outcome document.

In the dungeons of this conference, diplomats work until deep in the night on the outcome document. We see that governments are avoiding and eroding their responsibilities, instead of seizing this moment to make the strongest possible commitment. The outcome document does not reflect the spirit of the conference and the world around us. As it is now, it is a framework of vision and not a framework for action!

We have the knowledge for disaster reduction, what we need is the action. The most important condition for disaster reduction is the **political commitment** to remove the institutional barriers and integrate disaster risk reduction in the strategies and programmes for sustainable development and poverty reduction.

The years since the Yokohama strategy have confirmed the vital importance of disaster risk reduction. The problem was the lack of serious political commitment to institutionalize this vision into action. Disaster risk reduction has stayed in the margins of the relief structures. It must be incorporated in the Millennium Development Goals. The international community has prioritized health and education as basic needs. It is the time to do the same with disaster risk reduction.

We can and must reduce the numbers of people being killed and affected, and we must reduce the damage as proportion of the GDP. Disaster Risk Reduction is an essential element of development. In the next year you need to formulate targets and earmark funding to be able to take accountable and transparent action.

It must have been terrible to be the seismologist who saw the Tsunami happening on his computer-screen and was powerless to act. We urge you to make sure that the outcome document guarantees sustained political commitment that translates into concrete action that will make the world a safer place for all.

Kobe, 21.1.2005