

## **Australian Statement to the World Conference on Disaster Reduction**

Mr President, distinguished delegates.

The work of this conference has been brought into sharp relief by the tragic consequences of the Indian Ocean Tsunami.

In the wake of this tragedy, the Australia Government has committed to date one billion dollars to the Australia-Indonesia Partnership for Reconstruction and Development, 60 million dollars to other regional relief efforts, and a half million dollars to the flash appeal to assist the Seychelles.

We were also able to respond quickly and practically on the ground, deploying medical and victim identification teams, defence force field hospitals and rescue teams.

Furthermore, there has also been an outpouring of support from the Australian people, with private donations to the relief effort well over one hundred and fifty million dollars.

Sadly, there will inevitably be further natural disasters. Once again it might be a tsunami. It could happen again in the Indian Ocean. Or it might be in the Pacific or elsewhere. Or we might need to respond to a cyclone, volcanic eruption, drought or flood. Just a few days ago

tragedy struck in Australia where bushfires wrought a sad toll in casualties and destruction.

So, while, quite properly, the international community is focussed on the Indian Ocean tsunami, we are obliged at this conference to remember that disasters come in many forms; that they strike in many different places; and that there is no one single prevention and mitigation response that can cover all contingencies.

Australia is a country with a unique perspective on, and experience with a range of natural disasters. As an island continent we face some of the harshest and most variable weather in the world. And we have many remote communities. Our shores are lapped by both the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean. As a country we must be prepared for a range of natural disasters from cyclones and floods, to droughts and bushfires – as well as tsunamis.

It follows from this that we have a long and very diverse experience in disaster risk reduction and response, both domestically and in our region. For example, in the last decade we have helped Papua New Guinea respond to a tsunami, droughts, and the Rabaul volcanic eruption and in the Pacific and South East Asia we have helped with recovery from major cyclones and flooding.

May I share briefly, several perspectives that flow from Australia's own experience with preparing for and responding to disasters.

**First**, technical responses are necessary, but alone they are not enough in disaster reduction.

Technical solutions must go hand in hand with the development of good policy, political commitment, institutions, capacity building and – importantly – the development of community based responses.

**Second**, natural disasters respect no borders, which of course means regional and multilateral cooperation is critical. Ultimately, it is individual countries that are best placed to know their own priorities and capacities, what they can manage, and what they can maintain over the longer term.

**Third**, the institutional interface is critical to success. The international system needs to mesh with the regional; the regional with the national; the national with the provincial or sub national; right the way down to the village level.

**Fourth**, disasters have major consequences for the long-term development prospects of countries. Disasters strike all countries and that means, for example, while the recent tsunami disaster has riveted attention on those countries of the Indian Ocean, we must not overlook the very particular challenges and unique needs of Pacific Small Island Developing States in disaster risk management. In particular, Australia will continue to support these countries through capacity building initiatives that reinforce existing national institutional capability.

We must be smarter in the way we respond during the relief and rehabilitation phases, including by consciously designing interventions that are labour intensive, thereby reducing poverty.

And the rehabilitation phase needs to help countries produce better environments in which people can live and work. For example, Australia has constructed cyclone resistant public buildings in the Pacific that dramatically cut the cost of electricity for air conditioning and lighting; that slash ongoing maintenance costs or do not damage the environment. We all must be smarter and more innovative in what, where, and how things are reconstructed.

Fifth and finally, continued economic growth and development and good governance is ultimately the best way in which countries can increase their individual capacities for disaster reduction.

In closing I would briefly return to a matter to be discussed in a special session here, namely the need for a tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean.

Australia has proposed and strongly supports an international effort to establish an effective and durable tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean.

Many countries around the globe are willing to pledge financial and technical support to establish an Indian Ocean system. In developing

a system, Australia believes it must be tailored to the specific geological circumstances of the Indian Ocean and the individual requirements of regional countries. And it must be the regional countries themselves that determine the shape and nature of the system.

The Pacific system operated by regional countries under the auspices of the IOC, provides a sound model for the Indian Ocean. Australia looks forward to discussing the Indian Ocean proposal at the upcoming IOC meeting.

Australia thanks the Government of Japan, the prefecture of Hyogo and the city of Kobe for hosting the conference.

Australia looks very much forward to a productive Conference.  
Thank you.

Thank you Mr President  
I will be brief.

In the immediate aftermath of the Tournami  
the Prime Minister of Australia proposed  
an international effort to establish

an effective and durable Tournami early  
warning system for the Indian Ocean.

In developing the system Australia believes  
it must be tailored to the specific

circumstances of the Indian Ocean and  
the individual requirements of regional

countries. It follows that it must be the

regional countries themselves that determine

the shape and nature of the system. It  
should make use of existing systems. The

Pacific system operated under the auspices of  
the IOC provides a useful model for the Indian  
Ocean. Australia welcomes the draft paper

prepared by the Secretariat providing a  
common statement for the President and use

fully support this statement.

Thank you