



**Statement by His Excellency Mr. Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, MP,
Minister for Food and Disaster Management and Leader of the
Bangladesh Delegation to the World Conference on Disaster Reduction
at the Special Session on the Indian Ocean Disaster:
Risk Reduction for a Safer World
WCDR, Kobe-Hyogo, Japan, 20 January 2005**

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Minister Murata, Distinguished Panelists,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am indeed honoured to be here this morning to share our experience in dealing with disasters.

At the outset, I would like to join others in expressing our deepest sympathy to the people and the governments of the countries affected by the tsunami. Having felt the tremors but being spared of the havoc of the disaster, we are acutely aware of the pain and suffering of those affected. The widespread devastation caused by the tsunami once again highlights our vulnerability and the need for prevention and early warning. While the tsunami could not have been prevented, its impact could perhaps have been reduced if we were better prepared and if an effective early warning system was in place. There is obviously an urgent need to take timely and concerted actions to reduce disaster risks. This Conference could not have been more timely and topical coming in the aftermath of the tsunami. It provides us with a unique opportunity to strengthen our resolve to address such catastrophes in a concerted and effective manner. We hope that our deliberations here this morning would also contribute to a consensus on the creation and strengthening of a global early warning system addressing all forms of disasters.

Mr. Chairman,

Disasters are a recurring phenomenon for Bangladesh. Every year we suffer the wrath of nature in the form of floods and cyclones. Millions of lives are affected, thousands displaced, with hard-earned development gains literally *washed away* in the matter of hours. We have however, come to survive the brunt of nature through

inculcating a culture of prevention, preparedness and resilience in our national life. We have done this through an inclusive process of motivating and mobilizing the people and the most vulnerable communities to be active agents in the process of disaster risk reduction, prevention, and mitigation. We have mainstreamed disaster reduction and preparedness in our national development agenda. We have put in place effective machineries at the local and national levels to deal with disasters under the Ministry of Food and Disaster management. I would like to emphasize here that we have endeavoured to achieve all this through community involvement and empowerment, and sustainable risk management initiatives. And I am happy to say that our efforts have not been in vain.

Over the years, we have succeeded in reducing the impact of disasters considerably. For instance, last year, Bangladesh experienced one of the worst floods in recent history, inundating nearly half of the country. However, despite the colossal extent of the floods, belying all dire apprehensions, the lives lost, or spread of disease was remarkably low. Thanks to an effective food security system in place, we were also able to meet food requirements during the floods as well as in the post-disaster period. All this was possible because of an effective disaster management system that is in place.

Mr. Chairman,

In dealing with recurring disasters like cyclones and floods, we have realized that preparedness is a much more cost effective means to deal with the impact of disasters. Following the devastating cyclone of 1970, the Cyclone Preparedness Programme (CPP) was established under the auspices of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, which has a comprehensive programme encompassing dissemination of cyclone warning, evacuation, rescue and relief of the affected people. Throughout our coastal belt, we have some 2500 cyclone shelters which can accommodate up to 10 million people. Hundreds of community volunteer workers are involved in this programme. This programme has remarkably reduced the casualty from cyclones – in the 1999 cyclone for instance, the death toll was only 107. Our cyclone preparedness programme has important lessons, I believe, for those in similar situations, including the tsunami-affected countries.

Having said that, Mr. Chairman, we have much to learn on how to deal with earthquake disasters. Bangladesh is believed to be situated in an earthquake prone zone and highly vulnerable to major quakes. However, we are ill equipped to deal with earthquakes. In addition to early warning, we also need to develop our capacity to deal with earthquakes. In this context, I would like to underline the particular vulnerability of disaster prone developing countries, in particular the least developed countries with their inherent structural impediments, in dealing with recurring

disasters. The effects of climate change and global warming will continue to adversely affect the LDCs and other disaster prone developing countries such as the SIDs and continue to make them vulnerable to disasters. It is imperative that the international community supports these countries in their disaster reduction efforts through building their capacities to deal with disasters. This, I believe, would be a much more sustainable and effective approach.

Mr. Chairman,

As the tsunami disaster has demonstrated, there is an urgent need for concerted action to deal with disasters. This can be achieved through strong institutional mechanisms not only at the national level, but also at the regional and global levels. There is near unanimity on the creation of a global early warning system to deal with all forms of disasters. And if I may emphasize here – for any early warning system to be effective it has to be people centered and geared towards the most vulnerable communities. We hope that by the end of this morning, we can come up with strong and concrete recommendations aimed at reducing vulnerability to disasters and making the world a much more safer and predictable place to live.

I thank you for your attention.