

**Statement by H.E. Mohammad Yousof PASHTUN,
Minister of Urban Development and Housing
of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction
Kobe, 18-22 January 2005**

Mr. President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset I would like to thank the United Nations and our gracious Japanese hosts for having organized the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, hoping that this Conference would produce tangible and beneficial implementation strategy for all. For us especially, it is a pleasure to share and receive knowledge and vital experience for the survival of us all.

Afghanistan is categorized as a Least Developed Country (LDC) in need of sustainable development. A landlocked mountainous country with plains in the north and southwest, its climate is mostly dry with most inhabitants living in the rural areas. Unfortunately, natural calamities such as frequent earthquakes, recurrent droughts, floods, landslides and extreme cold weather have further contributed to the suffering of our people in addition to decades of conflict and resulting destruction. In addition, common hazards and agricultural pests, worsened by the removal of vegetation cover continue to cause considerable damage to farmland and environment. In fact, degradation of physical environment is a continuing phenomenon.

Since 2002, our efforts along with our international partners have not quite eradicated most of the problems. Although the Department for Disaster Preparedness was originally established in 1972, it was only recently that its revitalization after decades of war has enabled it to engage in appropriate response. Three years ago, the Department began its renewed effort from below zero level. By now, it has produced a National Institutional Strategy for Disaster Management and National Disaster Management Plan for Afghanistan with the support of UNAMA and the Asian Development Bank, which amongst others, prescribes the roles and responsibilities of various Ministries and stakeholders, provides a functional and acceptable organizational structure, preparedness and mitigation plans both in urban and rural settings. However, since Afghanistan is still in the early stages of recovery, enormous international assistance is needed in the disaster management sector, as assistance thus far has been vital but not sufficient. It is our earnest belief that Afghanistan will develop its disaster preparedness capacity before the current international assistance will phase out.

We strongly believe that advance warning against disaster is an essential step for effective risk reduction, nationally and internationally. On a national level, it requires local and provincial notice and on an international level, a regional and global one. Afghanistan would also welcome a North-South and South-South cooperation on scientific and technical transfer of know-how and capacity development on early warning. In addition, coordination of disaster reduction is essential. Further, as part of the preparation, multi-dimensional mass education is key. But mobilization and resources deployment on all levels are necessary for appropriately addressing a response. In this regard, we believe the United Nations can play a fundamental role.

I would like to end by sharing a poem by the famous Poet Sa'adi who said centuries ago:
Human beings are members of one Body,
As they are all created from the same essence,
If one member of this body suffers from pain,
The other members cannot stay at rest.

Thank you, Mr. President.