

**COOK ISLANDS COUNTRY PAPER**

**SECOND WORLD CONFERENCE ON DISASTER REDUCTION**

**18<sup>TH</sup> – 22<sup>ND</sup> JANUARY 2005**

**KOBE, JAPAN**

Mr Chairman,

Your Excellencies.

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

The Cook Islands would like to extend its thanks to you Mr Chairman, the Secretariat of this Conference and member countries for the privilege and honour extended to us to share experiences and ideas.

The generosity and hospitality of the host country Japan and the host community Kobe and their people is greatly appreciated. The warmth of their hospitality has made Kobe in winter a tropical paradise for us from the warm tropics.

Mr Chairman,

The Cook Islands is fully aware that we meet here in Kobe in the shadows of the recent past and yesterday; shaken by the seismic event of 1995 and despaired by the thundering echoes of breaking waters in December 2004.

The Cook Islands would like to extend its deepest sympathy to the communities and people sadly affected as well as our best wishes for their worthy and meaningful recovery.

Mr Chairman

There is no community in this world of ours that is free from some form of hazards that may have a disastrous impact. Where there is a difference is in the vulnerability threshold, which indicates the degrees of ability to cope and recover. Some can recover on their own and others need support. It is this reason that a comprehensive integrated approach based on the spirit of cooperation is necessary at the international, regional and national levels.

The statement by the Chairman of AOSIS and the presentation by the Marshal Islands on the Pacific Disaster Reduction and by previous speakers from the Pacific Island States is fully endorsed by the Cook Islands.

Cook Islands, like other Pacific Island Countries, need to improve its disaster reduction program through an integrated and holistic approach that can place it in the national context as part and parcel of good governance, sustainable development, security and the freedom of people to live a life of their own choice.

To achieve this mission, there is a need for more reliable and relevant scientific and technical information and improved communication systems for relatively isolated communities, and capacity building and research into the whys and hows and the future of SIDS.

The Cook Islands, like other Pacific Islands States, is grateful for the work undertaken for many years by the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center for the advisories on earthquakes and tsunami events.

However, the islands of the Pacific also need an early warning system that can cover the local tsunami of which there has been over twenty in the last 15 years, the latest one in 1998 was 50km wide and swept 1 km inland and destroyed several villages and killed over 2000 people in Papua New Guinea. Although a rare event in the Cook Islands, the 1960 Chilean earthquake brought some tsunami waves to the main island of Rarotonga. It is for this reason that the Island States believe there is a need for a feasibility study to identify needs and sustainability not only on the regional and technical level, but also at the local level for the establishment of an Early Tsunami Warning System.

Perhaps our friends from Australia, New Zealand, the Asian Development Bank and IOC/UNESCO will/can assist us to meet this critical need.

Mr Chairman,

There are, as indicated by previous speakers from Pacific Island Countries, many hazards and disasters of different types. But other than the strengthening of disaster management systems, capacity building and the integration of disaster work into the national and community planning and policy systems is seen as an investment. The only other issue that the Cook Islands would like to raise is that whatever we agree to do, it can only be of value if it is sustainable – in terms of human resources, training, finance and commitment.

In closing, the Cook Islands would like to express its appreciation to ISDR and other UN Agencies for its support and encouragement for our search for solutions; the governments of our traditional partners of Australia and New Zealand for their support in our efforts to invest for a sustainable future; and as well as to our new partners, Japan, China and Canada and the European Union amongst others and also inter-governmental agencies such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, the Red Cross and many other non-governmental organizations, the private sectors and civil society organizations all over the UN Ocean.

The Japan initiative as stated by Prime Minister Koizumi is most welcomed and perhaps the call by Under-Secretary Egeland for a percentage of relief funding to be used for disaster reduction could also be taken on in the Kobe Framework for Action.

At the regional level SOPAC has proven to be a most valuable regional organization for disaster work and community risk issues. It is our hope that SOPAC will continue to be supported and be developed not only for the benefit of our region but also of other SIDS regions and our communities and people.

The Cook Islands hope that our efforts in our small part of the world will prove successful and thus deserving of your efforts and that in partnership, we would continue to sail and enjoy the Pacific as part of our legacy and create the legacies for future generations to build on.

Thank You