

General Statement of the Head of the Delegation of the Czech Republic
WCDR in Kobe, January 19, 2005

Mr. Chairman, dear Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to have an opportunity to take the floor on the World Conference on Disaster Reduction on behalf of the Czech Republic. First of all, let me point out that the Czech Republic attaches great importance to the World Conference on Disaster Reduction and wishes to thank the Government of Japan for hosting this Conference.

We all are the witnesses that both natural and manmade disasters cause growing number of human losses and property damage, The problems of disaster reduction have become to be considered as a very important issue all over the world. Moreover, most of the victims of natural disasters are people from the poorest countries and the social and economic costs of disasters are enormous, while the loss of human lives is incalculable.

The Czech Republic has also been facing natural disasters during last few years. The most frequent ones in our country are floods, windstorms, hailstorms, snowdrifts and sometimes land slides. Undoubtedly the most serious disasters in the Czech Republic were floods in 1997 and 2002, which affected lives of millions of citizens of our country.

The flood in the year 1997 showed some weak points in preparedness of the State Emergency System for managing such major disasters. That lead to an extensive legislative activities and creation of the new crisis management and integrated rescue system law package. This new legislation set up a clear framework for co-operation of all main players in early warning and relief operations. The new system was successfully applied during the catastrophic flood in 2002 year, which lead to a great improvement in early warning and preparedness for relief operations in comparison with the flood 5 years ago. At that time we suffered the damages of almost 2 billion EURO and were very thankful for any help, including international.

On the other hand, the Czech Republic often provides humanitarian assistance abroad and Czech national rescue teams helped during the last five years for example after earthquakes in Turkey, Taiwan, Algeria and Iran, during forest fires in Macedonia and Slovakia or after windstorms and during floods in France.

We have also actively helped during the recent tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean. Not only the Czech Government but also the Czech citizens showed their strong solidarity. Up to now, it was collected more than 250 million CZK (approximately 11 million USD) through charity and foundations and this amount is increasing every day.

To improve activities in disaster reduction the Czech Republic established Czech National Committee for Disaster Reduction, which creates a basis for better coordination of disaster reduction activities within the country between various institutions from the state, private and public sectors. This Committee concentrates its activities especially on early warning and training and education of people. The committee cooperates with similar national platforms in Central European and recently with EU countries in general as well as with the ISDR Secretariat in Geneva. Such international cooperation should continuously be strengthened.

Although the extent of natural disasters in the Czech Republic is not comparable with the tragedy that taken place in Indonesia I hope that our experience with mitigation of disaster's effects could be useful for the other countries as well.

Mr. Chairman,

The Czech Republic welcomes the opportunity to participate on the World Conference on Disaster Reduction. We know from our experience, and it has been confirmed by the recent tsunami disaster, that **early warning together with public preparedness** are key factors for decrease of vulnerability to disasters and especially to diminish human losses. Therefore, Mr. Chairman, the Czech Republic welcomes and fully supports all recent UN and international activities in this direction especially the recent initiative of WMO with IOC of UNESCO to create new warning system for tsunami in the Indian Ocean as well as the initiatives towards training and increase of preparedness. In a longer term, we fully support all activities for creation of the Global Earth Observing System of Systems (GEOSS), which is a right and systematic way for facing disasters at the world, regional and national scales.

Mr. Chairman, let me express my deeply wishes that this Conference will contribute in rather concrete form to the strengthening of coordination and cooperation between the countries in disaster risk reduction.