

World Conference on Disaster Reduction
Kobe, Japan, 18-22 January 2005
General Statement by Denmark
Wednesday 19 January 2005

Mr. Chairman, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Let me join others in thanking the Japanese Government and people for hosting this event, which also coincides with the 10 year commemoration of a terrible earthquake that hit Kobe.

The UN has a major role to play in the international efforts on disaster reduction. As member states we must ensure that it is well equipped, with adequate and predictable funding to play its proper role – also in the future. My delegation will gladly participate in a discussion on this issue.

This conference is a milestone to:

- a. Increase international profile of disaster reduction
- b. Promote the integration of disaster risk reduction in national sustainable development planning at all levels
- c. Strengthen local and national capacities to address causes of disasters.

The importance and relevance of disaster reduction has with recent events (in the Indian Ocean) been clearly demonstrated. We do not need to be reminded – its importance is all too clear. It is now more a question of transforming the unprecedented public interest and international solidarity into concrete actions. This conference is a welcome opportunity to discuss this in more detail.

Concerning the promotion of disaster risk reduction into development planning and practice, it is essential to demonstrate to decision makers the central importance of disaster risk reduction as a development priority. There is no trade off between combating poverty and reduce disaster risk. On the contrary. It is the poorest countries, and it is the poorest segments of society that are most at risk and most vulnerable. We should therefore integrate the risk reduction in our discussion of poverty reduction strategies.

We need of course to balance this against other development efforts, including enhanced focus on documentation of cost and benefits of disaster reduction.

Strengthening of local and national capacities to resist natural disasters and to resist the effects is perhaps the most important. The recent Indian Ocean Tsunami has demonstrated the vulnerability of local communities in coastal areas, while at the same time their coping capacities.

Appropriate solutions may involve:

- Capacity development at the appropriate levels - not least the local community level – to enhance abilities to translate early warnings into effective action to protect the most vulnerable groups.
- More effective partnerships among relevant stakeholders in the public sector, civil society and the private sector.
- Improved planning, including more effective participation and involvement of local stakeholders in the planning process. This includes applying innovative technologies and more importantly a community based disaster preparedness approach.
- Zoning approaches that may help reduce or avoid human settlements development and construction in the most disaster prone coastal areas. Following the recent tsunami, it is important - where feasible - to relocate vital and sensitive infrastructure and facilities to higher grounds as part of reconstruction efforts. Such measures may also assist in adaptation to the effects of climate change.
- Environment-friendly solutions to protection of the coastline and coastal settlements in an integrated coastal zone management approach that may involve conservation and re-establishment of mangroves, coral reefs and other protective ecosystem.

We need to elaborate on this further. To this end Denmark is pleased to announce its initiative towards an international workshop in 2005 on strengthening the resilience of local communities to cope with disasters.

This initiative will focus on the protection of people, infrastructure and environment in disaster prone areas, including water, sanitation and health issues.

In closing, let me say that despite the terrible tragedies and human suffering we find comfort in the unprecedented show of global sympathy. Let me assure you that Denmark will do her utmost to assist in overcoming the current disaster situation and in developing effective and sustainable measures to avoid such tragedies in the future.