

Italy

World Conference on Disaster Reduction

Mr. Chairman,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, the Italian Delegation wishes to extend its deepest sympathies and condolences to the victims of the recent Tsunami disaster and their families. Italy expresses its heartfelt solidarity to the people and the Governments of those countries which tragically suffered a huge loss of lives, serious injuries and extensive material damages.

The Italian Delegation wishes to also thank both the Government of Japan for the excellent organization of the Conference and the ISDR Secretariat for the accuracy in preparing this international Conference. This global gathering represents, especially in these days, marked by the dramatic events which occurred in South East Asia, an important opportunity to remind us of the relevance of disaster risk reduction activity and of the implementation of early warning systems in order to save human lives. In this regard we welcome all proposals for establishing Tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean as well in other regions such as the Caribbean and Mediterranean Sea to be

implemented under the framework of the competent International Organizations.

Italy was quick to react to the disaster in South East Asia to assist the populations in the aftermath of the Tsunami; the response has been strong and generous from the Government, local authorities, civil society and the general public. In particular, 10 million EURO have been committed for emergency operations, 72.5 million EURO as financial contribution from the Government, at least 2.5 million EURO from Italy's local authorities and an amount of approximately 40 million EURO has been collected through private donations. Italy will also convert 30 million EURO of the affected countries' bilateral debt.

Disasters have a major impact on the living conditions, social and economic development and environmental assets of affected countries and regions. Negative consequences may continue on the long term and may even affect irreversibly economic and social structures and the environment. In industrialized countries, disasters cause massive damage to the large stock of accumulated capital, while losses of human life tend to be limited thanks, among other factors, to the availability of effective early warning and tested evacuation systems, as well as better urban planning and the application of strict building codes and standards.

In developing countries, on the other hand, fatalities are usually higher owing to the lack or inadequacy of forecasts and well prepared evacuation and life-saving programmes. Although capital losses might be smaller in absolute terms when compared to those in developed countries, their relative weight and overall impact tend to be very significant, even effecting sustainability of fragile economic and social processes.

Reconstruction of damaged or destroyed assets in developing countries, however, normally requires a sustained effort and resources well beyond those available during the emergency or humanitarian assistance stage, or otherwise within reach of the affected country. As a result, reconstruction is often undertaken without vulnerability reduction. To put it bluntly, there is the danger that vulnerability is reconstructed instead of being reduced. In this regard we will consider with particular interest Mr. Egeland proposal of a new funding initiative to meet the global challenges posed by natural hazards.

In this light we want to underline the necessity to fund not only disaster relief but also development. In simple words, if emergency assistance maybe considered as a band-aid, development and continued aid are the only vaccine to the illness.

Immediately after the emergency stage, an assessment must be made of the direct and indirect effects of the event and their consequences on the social well-being and economic performance of the affected country or area. Such an assessment should be comprehensive, covering the complete range of effects and their cross-implications for economic and social sectors, physical infrastructure and environmental assets. With such estimates in hand, it is possible to determine the extent of reconstruction requirements, which is an urgent task since those affected cannot wait long under the difficult conditions prevailing after a disaster occurs.

Reconstruction programmes and projects, which may require the international community's financial and technical cooperation, must be designed within a mitigation and prevention strategy that is part of the development process, in order to ensure vulnerability reduction.

In view of the above Italy deeply appreciates the holistic approach towards disaster management adopted by the draft document "*Building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters: elements for the program of actions 2005-2015*" and considers that the Yokohama Strategy retains its full relevance in the present context. In particular the following issues deserve particular attention:

- sharing of information and the institution of decision-making processes related to risk assessment, management and reduction.
- the definition of command and control systems at local, national and international levels to ensure the responsiveness of the competent authorities.
- the development of know-how and scientific technologies to monitor hazardous events and ensure appropriate warnings to the population at risk, with focus on areas often highly populated and therefore more vulnerable.
- strategies and activities related to the mitigation of risks, including development planning guidelines for vulnerable areas and communities.

Sharing both technical and operational information among different institutional and administrative levels is essential for ensuring efficiency and coordination against permanent risks. In this regard Italy wants to underline the importance of the UN and its Agencies in coordinating these efforts. The Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs recalled at the 7th January 2005 EU General Affairs Council that all relief efforts must be conducted under the overall coordinating role of the United Nations, while the recipient Governments must have the responsibility of deciding the priorities in aid and assistance.

In conclusion, Italy would like to highlight that this Conference represents a key step forward on the way to efficient international cooperation on:

- The establishment of effective early warning systems, at national and international level, for saving lives;
- integrated relief actions to support affected communities;
- improving the capabilities of Developing Countries, with the appropriate means, to cope with disasters before the arrival of international aid.

Thank you for your attention