

*Statement for the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (Kobe, Japan
18-22 January, 2005)*

Mr. Chairman,

We meet here at a time when the Tsunami disaster has caused massive devastation in terms of tremendous human loss and large scale destruction of physical infrastructure in the coastal areas of South East Asian countries. The world stands shocked and aggrieved at the unimaginable human loss and the sufferings of survivors. Such suffering and devastation is shocking in both its magnitude and the speed with which it occurred. The catastrophic proportion of the tragedy has lent a sense of urgency to the task of devising strategies to strengthen local, national and international capacities to address the issues of natural disasters which, apart from causing death and destruction for millions, continue to impede the development of many countries by their incessant recurrence.

I am sure that the world has learnt certain lessons from this colossal calamity. I will like to share those lessons with you:

- The tsunami catastrophe has revealed the extent of the ill-preparedness of the world at the national, regional as well as at international levels to anticipate disasters and to make proportionate efforts for providing immediate rescue assistance, medical care and to rehabilitate the infrastructure.
- The affected countries were lacking adequate early warning systems. The existing departments were not equipped to anticipate the disaster;
- The national focal points for mitigating disasters were almost absent and lacked required capacities;
- The disaster reduction system was not able to gear itself towards efficient and swift coordination among all relevant agencies in the post-disaster phase;
- The civil defence system was not able to cope with disasters of such magnitude;
- The national, regional and international bodies involved in disaster reduction and relief assistance lacked proper coordination and financial resources;

We should have known this already, but it has taken a tsunami to press the point home. The question now is whether we will act over the long term in the same spirit of unity and solidarity that characterizes the current moment.

Mr. Chairman,

Pakistan, despite its limited resources, took expeditious actions to mitigate the impact of Tsunami on the countries of South Asia and South East Asia through swift measures including relief, rescue operations, medical assistance, rehabilitation and reconstruction. These steps are as follows:

- Immediately after the earthquake, two Pakistan Navy ships (Tariq and Nasr), which were in the Maldives on a goodwill visit, rendered instantaneous emergency rescue and relief assistance. These ships, with the help of helicopter units, rescued 367 persons from 21 nationalities.
- Pakistani ships also established a Medical Assistance Centre at the main jetty and provided medical assistance to the injured. On 28 December 2004, the two Naval ships left for the Eastern and Western zones of the Maldives for assistance and aerial survey/damage assessment. On 31 December, a C-130 aircraft carrying relief items of tents, blankets, foodstuff and medicines was dispatched to Maldives;
- Both President General Pervez Musharraf and the Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, besides sending messages of condolences and sympathies, also spoke to the leaders of the affected countries by telephone, assuring them of Pakistan's fullest cooperation and assistance in rescue operations;
- Urgent relief assistance worth Rs. 50 million was provided to Sri Lanka, Maldives and Indonesia. The "President's Relief Fund for Tsunami Victims" was established on 31st December 2004 and the newspapers and electronic media were mobilized for the purpose.
- The Prime Minister, in his capacity as Chairman of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), has called for evolving a mechanism for an "Asia-wide Early Warning and Disaster Response Regime". Pakistan has also decided to support and co-sponsor a resolution on "Establishing Regional Mechanisms on Surveillance, Prevention and Assessment of Severe Natural Disasters" which China intends to present during this Conference.
- Pakistan has also decided to join the International Task Force to coordinate worldwide relief and international efforts for the Asian region ravaged by the deadly earthquake and Tsunami waves.
- We have also extended our support for ASEAN proposal to resume the Plenary of 59th UN General Assembly to consider agenda item on

“Strengthening coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations including special economic assistance”.

Pakistan has been supporting the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR). We have not only played an active role in the International Civil Defence Organization, but have also welcomed the establishment of the Framework Convention on Civil Defence Assistance by the ICDO in 2000 which is applicable to disaster prevention and preparedness. During the past decades, Pakistan has extended all possible assistance in cash and kind to a number of countries which at one time or another have been stricken by natural calamities.

Mr. Chairman,

Although the themes of disaster reduction and humanitarian relief assistance have been on the agenda of the United Nations, yet these have not been treated with as much importance and urgency as other issues of security. The disasters have a direct bearing on the sustainable development which has implications for the security. These inter-linkages in today's globalized world demand that the subject of natural disaster reduction should be dealt at par with the security issues as more people have perished in natural disasters than during wars. We hope that the interconnectedness of development and security will be accepted by the world community.

The chair may like to consider the following recommendations which may help contain damage in future:

- The United Nations' performance through its agencies like International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), UN Development Programme (UNDP) and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in various phases of disaster reduction leaves much to be improved upon. The UN System in collaboration with other partners will have to further intensify its support to the national governments in their strategies of building disaster-resilient societies by prioritizing disaster reduction in their national policies;
- The UN agencies must accord utmost importance and attention to the preventive aspects of the disaster reduction strategy. These organizations have so far been mainly focused on the post-disaster phase;
- The realization of these objectives will require ready availability of adequate financial resources not only with the United Nations but also with the developing countries especially those in special situations like the Land Locked Developing countries (LLDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS);

- The developed countries, as a matter of moral responsibility should transfer the requisite technologies and expertise to the developing countries which are most hit by the natural disasters due to non-availability of efficient and reliable early warning systems as well as the post-disaster coordination. The need for efficient and reliable early warning systems at national, regional and global levels can hardly be over-emphasized. A number of countries along with the UN have initiated work in that direction;
- As regards the regional approach, we believe that measures like regional collaboration on enhancing early warning systems; establishment of standard operating procedures for mutual assistance in times of disasters of catastrophic proportions; creation of disaster resources inventory; and regional Action Plans for disasters could go a long way in effectively tackling and mitigating the natural disasters.
- The sharing of best practices should be accompanied by the capacity building particularly of the vulnerable countries;

Mr. Chairman,

While the world is still engaged in comprehending the recent manifestation of nature's fury, the lessons learnt so dearly must lend a strong impetus to the momentum for taking practical actions for disaster reduction. The burden now falls on all of us to take up this challenge. I am confident that this conference will achieve its main objectives of advancing disaster reduction at the community level and encouraging relevant policy formulation at the global and national levels.

On our part, let me assure you that Pakistan, within its resource constraints, would never be found lacking in either commitment or actions stemming from a consensual substantive outcome of this conference.

I thank you Sir.