

**STATEMENT AT THE PLENARY SESSION OF THE  
WORLD CONFERENCE ON DISASTER REDUCTION**

by

**The Portuguese Delegation**

**(Kobe, Hyogo, Japan)**

**January 19, 2005**

Mr. Chairman

I welcome this possibility to address, in name of Portugal, the World Conference on Disaster Reduction taking place here in Kobe, Hyogo.

I will also take this opportunity to congratulate Japan for the excellent hospitality offered to the delegates and by the remarkable recover of Kobe after the terrible events occurred 10 years ago.

The Yokohama strategy and its plan of implementation, outcomes of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction held in 1994, have been since then the basis of the measures taken all around the world for the reduction of the natural disasters. The review of this strategy, objective of this Conference, is very important to assure the attainment of the Millennium Goals, to support the implementation of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and to take into account the new realities of the beginnings of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Statistics over the last 20 years show that natural disasters worldwide have killed almost two million people, inflicted injuries, facilitated the spread of diseases and displaced over one billion people. Statistics also show that, in spite of the measures that are being taken, the number of natural disasters and the associated economic losses continue to increase due to the greater vulnerability of the populations and possibly to climate change.

The most recent natural disaster, on 26 December 2004, the tsunami that occurred in Southeast Asia, destroying infrastructures and killing tens of thousand people, and its social, economic and environmental impact gave us all the notion of how much our civilization is vulnerable, in spite of its development in science and technology.

This disaster gave rise to a vigorous humanitarian mobilisation worldwide and Portugal also wants to express here its solidarity to the countries and people affected, already materialized through humanitarian assistance offered to those countries.

We also need to learn from this disaster the importance of implementing the necessary early warning systems for this kind of phenomena. As you are aware, Portugal is particularly sensitive to this type of events: in fact, a tsunami in 1755 affected our coastal zone, destroying a wide part of Lisbon where more than twelve thousand people were killed.

Mr. Chairman,

This meeting is an opportunity to promote, in a more broad way, the development of a culture of prevention and pre-disaster strategies as part of the disaster preparedness plan. In this connection, stress should be laid upon the importance of explicit socio-economic studies in order to show clearly the cost-benefit of investment in natural disaster reduction, namely in early warning systems.

I would also wish to take this opportunity to stress some measures that Portugal considers as essential ones in the framework of natural disaster risk reduction. It is essential:

- To improve the earth observation systems, either ground or space based, to monitor the extreme events that cause natural disasters, to enable better forecasting, and more accurate early warnings.
- To improve the understanding of the vulnerabilities at national and regional level, through risk assessment studies in order to enable the implementation of risk management policies.
- To improve the mechanisms for information exchange, early warning dissemination and management of emergencies during and after disaster. For that purpose, the existence of a link with the World Summit on Information Society is considered as highly desirable.
- To promote the involvement of the private sector in risk management, namely in shared responsibility of public and private sectors in the process of vulnerability reduction.
- To promote education in order to change behaviour, and to improve risk awareness of the population through an involvement of the media.
- To promote the implementation of measures towards adaptation to climate change.
- To promote good practices in agriculture in order to reduce environmental impacts, namely soil erosion.
- To promote the establishment or strengthening of multi-sectoral national platforms and regional groups for identification of priorities and to facilitate coordination and action to reduce risks of natural and technological kind induced by natural extreme phenomena.

Mr. Chairman,

To conclude, I wish to express that Portugal recognises the need to reinforce the international cooperation and the international capacity to respond to the challenges we are facing in natural disaster risk reduction.

As I referred before Portugal agrees that the establishment, all around the world, where justified, of early warning systems, namely for tsunami, is needed in order to prevent disasters like the one of 26 December 2004. In this context, in our region, we have already submitted a proposal within the European Union, for the establishment of an early warning system for tsunami in the Atlantic and in the Mediterranean regions.

Stressing the importance of the practical results of the Conference to the review of the strategy and plan for 2005-2015 and envisaging the improvement of risk reduction all over the world, we believe that we should start our work on the implementation of new early warning systems from now on. Towards that goal, Portugal would like to declare its availability for the cooperation with the other countries within this new framework of action.

Thank you for your attention.