

Speech by H.E.Dr. Predrag Filipov, Ambassador of Serbia and Montenegro in Japan,
Head of Delegation of Serbia and Montenegro
at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction
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Ten years ago, the city of Kobe was the centre of a natural disaster and human tragedy. Today, once again world attention is focused on it, but this time as the venue of a conference of global significance. The conference is taking place less than a month after the devastating earthquake that hit central Southeast Asia, taking a toll of tens of thousands of human lives from all over the world, the lives of those who had come to admire and marvel its natural beauties. On behalf of the citizens of my country, Serbia and Montenegro, may I express our condolences and solidarity with the bereaved families and all of those who have sustained losses.

It is with great pleasure that I take this opportunity, on behalf of the delegation of Serbia and Montenegro and on my own behalf, to pay my respects to His Imperial Majesty Akihito, and to express our gratitude to Prime Minister Koizumi and the Government of Japan, the Mayor of Kobe, as well as senior representatives of the United Nations and international agencies.

Among us, there are envoys of Heads of State, prominent political personalities, renowned scientists and outstanding figures from the world of culture. They have come to the country of the rising sun, bringing along their special features and diversity. What unites us here are our desire and resolve to have this international conference, as the major event marking the beginning of the New Year, identify adequate new solutions and provide appropriate institutional framework and funds to face the challenges and dangers threatening the well-being and survival of mankind, whether they result from natural disasters or are man-made.

The decade following the tragic accident in Kobe has been marked by series of devastating earthquakes and other natural disasters with surging losses of life and vast material damage, with further dramatic effects, including economic crisis and political upheavals. The scale of these disasters make firmer our conviction that we must join our efforts and potentials so as to be able to predict and prevent natural disasters, reduce the losses and increase effectiveness in removing the consequences, or else face an all-out threat to mankind and global destruction.

The frequency of accidents that are becoming even more serious, caused by forcing nature or by excessive use of natural resources or toxic chemicals damaging natural balance, as well as outsourcing of environmentally unfriendly technologies instead of the most sophisticated ones friendly to the environment, have further aggravated living conditions in underdeveloped regions and countries in transition. To deny nations the opportunity to achieve sustainable development and growth is, in fact, a gross violation of human rights, as these countries are deprived of the basic resources to protect and defend themselves from soil, water or air pollutants.

These developments have contributed to the stepped-up efforts in my country to bring potential environmental hazards under control. To align with European standards, the Ministries of Interior of the state union members have taken steps to create a Division for Environmental Protection in Emergency Situations covering a wide range of preventive, rescue and rehabilitation measures.

Also, a national strategy to deal with emergencies is currently under preparation. It will be based on the examination of vulnerabilities and identify measures to protect from natural disasters, industrial accidents or contamination as a result of radiation or bio chemicals. The relevant legislation will have to be amended to put this concept into practice.

International cooperation in this field will be in line with the main premises of my country's foreign policy and cooperation of the Interior Ministries based on international treaties and other established forms of international cooperation.

In order for this concept to be implemented nationally, regionally and globally, it will be necessary to allocate appropriate financial resources, or for developed countries to assist or at least to be in solidarity with the countries and regions lacking funds for these purposes.

In conclusion, I thank the Japanese Government and people for hosting this international event, expressing the hope that our Conference will adopt the Programme of Action for Disaster Response by Nations and Communities 2005-2015. Therefore, I express full support to the actions taken by the United Nations agencies and the Secretary-General himself in the application of a multi-sectoral approach to disaster risk reduction and management, where early warning and prevention as well as rehabilitation and recovery systems should be accorded priority. That will be the most effective contribution to the reduction of fatal effects of natural disasters.

Thank you.