



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

by

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I would like to join other speakers in thanking Japan for organising and hosting this Conference, which I hope will be a landmark event in the history of disaster reduction. My special thanks also go to the people of the prefecture of Hyogo for their hospitality and their willingness to share their experiences.

As we gather here in Kobe, we must spare a special thought for the communities and countries that were struck by the recent tsunami disaster. Like other speakers, I would like to express the heartfelt compassion and solidarity of the people and Government of Switzerland.

In 1994, the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, held in Yokohama, Japan, highlighted the increasing frequency and the scale of losses caused by disasters worldwide, especially in developing countries, and called upon the international community to redouble its efforts towards reducing these losses. The Review of the Yokohama Strategy identifies areas of progress, but the recent tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean and other recent catastrophes show that huge challenges remain.

Disaster reduction and sustainable development are mutually reinforcing objectives. Sustainable development must systematically incorporate the full range of risk reduction tools, including risk assessment and monitoring, early warning and good development and planning practices. Such an integrated approach to disaster risk reduction is not an optional add-on to development. Rather, it should be integral to development policy and practice and seen as an investment for the future with substantial returns.

The Government of Switzerland, in the person of Dr Marco Ferrari, had the honor and privilege to chair the Committee who elaborated in many sessions the outcome document of this Conference, which is to be adopted at the end of this Conference. The "Hyogo Framework for Action" will be the guiding light of our actions over the next ten years. The Government of Switzerland is committed to integrating its recommendations into its policy and practice, both at home and in the context of its

development and humanitarian assistance. We call upon all the other countries and organizations represented here to do the same.

We sincerely hope that this World Conference will help to promote a culture of disaster prevention which addresses all levels – from the community to the international - and all sectors of society. It is our duty to accelerate efforts in strengthening pre-disaster strategies. While natural hazards may not be avoided, pre-disaster efforts such as integration of risk assessment and early warnings into prevention and mitigation measures can prevent them from turning into major disasters. Much can be achieved through partnerships and the better mobilisation and use of existing resources and structures.

The success of a move to a culture of disaster prevention depends on our approach to managing risk. As a mountainous country, Switzerland is confronted with a wide range of natural hazards. At the thematic session on risk management in mountainous regions that we run yesterday, we highlighted our policies.

Whether on country or community level, Switzerland advocates an integrated disaster reduction approach that addresses all hazards, vulnerabilities and risks; includes all stakeholders in the process, equally addresses prevention, response and recovery mechanisms and enhances sustainability of disaster reduction efforts. However, disaster risk management is not just a technical process – it is also a socio-political process that involves trade-offs between competing objectives and priorities. In this respect, good governance must be the bedrock of disaster reduction, based on the principles of participation, transparency and equality.

In 1997, the Government of Switzerland created its national Platform for National Hazards PLANAT. Under the motto «from defending against danger to being aware of risks», PLANAT commits itself to a change of paradigms in handling natural hazards. It promotes safety planning that must not be restricted to protect individual values from certain dangers within clearly delimited areas of responsibility. Instead of looking at flooding, rockfall, landslides or avalanches separately, all experts involved have to be aware of public protection interests both entirely and interdisciplinary. PLANAT has three main missions: 1) strategic work, 2) creation of awareness and 3) coordination.

In closing, I would like to reiterate the full commitment of the Swiss government to working together with its partners towards realising the vision of safer world set out in the Yokohama Strategy, the Millennium Declaration as well as at this Conference. This commitment will be put to the test, not only in the next few days, but also in the months and years that follow. Let us be resolute and determined in working towards the grand objectives we have set ourselves, both for this Conference and beyond.

Thank you for your attention.