

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

by

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I would first like to like to express the appreciation of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs and my own, for the opportunity to address the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR). I am also grateful to the Government and people of Japan for making this Conference a reality, as well as for their hospitality. I am happy to recognize their leading efforts to contributing to disaster reduction worldwide.

Because of the inevitable occurrence of natural phenomena, exacerbated by global environmental change, aggravated ecological imbalances, the growing world population, inappropriate human practices in terms of land use and land development and increasing pressures on other resources of the Earth, disasters are occurring more frequently and their consequential damage is increasing. That situation, in turn, is causing deforestation, desertification, soil erosion, water deficit, poor health and an impoverished quality of life, all of which inhibit sustainable development.

We have recently witnessed the tremendous impact on human life and property of the recent tsunamis that devastated large coastal areas in the Indian Ocean. Due to the magnitude of the disaster there has been an outpouring of international support for relief and rehabilitation. However, although other disasters have not been as visible, according to some estimates, over the last decade, the cost attributed to natural disasters amounts annually, on average, to over 60,000 human lives lost, almost 250 million lives affected and damages estimated at \$70 billion.

One of the main recommendations put forward at the Third United Nations Conference on the Exploration and Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (UNISPACE III) was the need to implement an integrated, global system, especially through international cooperation, to manage natural disaster mitigation, relief and prevention efforts, especially of an international nature, through Earth observation, satellite communications and other space-based services, making maximum use of existing capabilities and filling gaps in worldwide satellite coverage. From this recommendation several actions were initiated by the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space and by the Office for Our Space Affairs. At the same time it was recognized that implementing this recommendation requires capacity building for developing countries to have access and be in a position to use space-based technologies including images from Earth observation satellite, satellite communications and global navigation satellite systems for risk reduction and disaster management.

In 2001, the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space agreed to establish action teams composed of interested Member States in order to implement the recommendations of UNISPACE III that had been accorded the highest priority or for which an offer had been received from member States to lead the associated work. The Action Team on Disaster Management, known as Action Team 7 and led by Canada, China and France, was one of twelve such teams. The membership of the Action Team included 40 Governments, 9 United Nations entities and 4 inter-governmental and non-governmental entities. In its final report, after three years of work, Action Team 7 put forward three recommendations for further action:

- i) establishment of an disaster management international coordination entity to provide for coordination and the means for optimising the effectiveness of space-based services for use in disaster management;
- ii) establishment of a fund to provide sustainable resources for the use of space technology in disaster management and to build capacity in national and international civil protection and rescue authorities; and
- iii) that countries should be strongly encouraged to allocate a portion of their disaster management resources to using space technologies and to identify single points of contact for their respective countries, in order to focus their internal disaster management activities and to liaise with external efforts

In October 2004, the General Assembly adopted a resolution (A/RES/59/2) following its five-year review of the implementation of the recommendations of UNISPACE III in which it agreed that a study should be conducted on the possibility of creating an international entity to provide for coordination and the means for optimizing the effectiveness of space-based services for use in disaster management. The study should be prepared by an ad-hoc expert group, with experts and required funding to be provided by interested Member States and relevant international organizations, for submission to the Committee for its review at its next session, in 2005. This group is open for participation by any interested Member State and it will meet for the first time during the forty-second session of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee of the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (to be held in Vienna, Austria, from 21 February to 4 March 2005). The Office for Outer Space Affairs will support these efforts.

Also, as a result of UNISPACE III, the European and French space agencies (ESA and CNES) initiated the International Charter "Space and Major Disasters" in 2000, with the Canadian Space Agency (CSA) joining the Charter shortly thereafter. Since then, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) and the Comisión Nacional de Actividades Espacial of Argentina also became members of the Charter. The International Charter aims at providing a unified system of space data acquisition and delivery to those affected by natural or man-made disasters through authorized users in the

case of major disasters. Since last 26 December, a great many of the satellite images that are being used in the relief efforts following the tsunami have been provided, at no cost, by members of the Charter. Each member agency of the Charter has committed resources to support this initiative.

In March 2003 the Office for Outer Space Affairs was accepted as a Cooperating Body to the Charter, a mechanism through which the UN system can request images to the Charter members to help respond to emergency situations. Beginning 1 July 2003 the Office set up a 24/7 hotline to which UN Focal Points can fax requests for imagery to support disaster response. Through this mechanism the UN system has successfully had access to Charter products to respond to 14 disasters including the recent mega disaster in Southeast Asia.

As part of the United Nations Programme on Space Applications the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs organised between 2000-2004 a series of regional workshops on the use of space technology for disaster management, bringing the results of the regional workshops to a final international workshop, which was held in Munich last October. This wrap-up workshop was jointly organised by the Office and the German Aerospace Center (DLR), and by UNESCO, UN-ISDR, and the European Space Agency.

A total of 170 participants from 51 countries discussed in Munich a global strategy, which would contribute to helping developing countries have access and be able to use space technology for disaster management, a strategy that was put forward as "The Munich Vision: A Global Strategy for Improved Risk Reduction and Disaster Management Using Space Technologies". The participants in Munich recognised that space-based technologies (Earth observation satellites, communication satellites, and global navigation satellite systems) play an important role in risk reduction and disaster management and put forward a number of recommendations in the areas of: capacity development and knowledge building; data access, data availability and information extraction; enhancing awareness; and the need for National, Regional and Global Coordination

Specifically, with regard to national and regional coordination participants agreed that the channelling of space technology for risk reduction and disaster management activities at the national and regional levels should be carried out through a Type II partnership of interested institutions and UN agencies, to be registered in the context of the present World Conference on Disaster Reduction. We invite interested national and regional institutions to join this partnership.

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