

UNITAR

STATEMENT BY THE UNITED NATIONS INSTITUTE
FOR TRAINING AND RESEARCH (UNITAR)
AT THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON DISASTER REDUCTION

Mr. President,

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Colleagues,

UNITAR, a firm supporter of the goals and principles of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and a member of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Disaster Reduction, is delighted to have the opportunity to address this prestigious forum. We congratulate the Government of Japan and the ISDR for the organization of the WCDR, which this week is home to the disaster reduction community.

As part of this community we believe that this is a milestone event. Together with our colleagues from the UN family we expect this Conference to increase the profile of disaster reduction and promote a strategic and systematic approach to address vulnerability and reduce risk.

The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake of 10 years ago and the all too recent Asia Tsunami constitute a tragic background against which our collective responsibility can only look heavier and more important. These macro disasters stand out amid an uninterrupted series of smaller but equally lethal disasters that has been hitting humankind for centuries on end. At UNITAR we believe that since the Yokohama Conference in 1994 the international community has come a long way in devising measures to counter disaster risk.

However daunting the task still ahead of us, technical solutions exist today that can improve the life of millions and give substance to our collective aspiration to a safer world for future generations. We have the understanding of the key issues, we command a number of solutions, and therefore this is the time to make advancements on the implementation front. It has been said that this is not a question of COST, but rather one of INVESTMENT. We subscribe fully to this point of view.

Through its operational programme UNOSAT that was initiated in 2001 with the support of France and Norway, our agency is working with space agencies, UN sister agencies and a large user community to bring to fruition the potential provided by earth observation and satellite technology. We do so keeping in mind (1) The essential connection between the national and the community level, and (2) The continuum that characterizes disaster management, of which disaster prevention is a crucial component.

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That is why UNOSAT operates across the disaster management spectrum, being equally active in supporting emergency relief and longer term prevention. We work with UN and non-UN partner entities ranging from the NGO community to the Council of Europe Agreement on Major Risks, which is a policy forum we value. We have experimented for years now how geo-information generated during the response phase can become a building block of community-based knowledge for smart reconstruction and lead to sustainable development.

Earth Observation from Outer Space offers the invaluable possibility of objectively mapping risk and vulnerability and contributes to addressing them properly and effectively. Indeed unless objective and impartial knowledge is built and put in the hands of those at risk, the fundamental aim of reducing risk will be missed.

To accomplish our mission we work hard with the space community and participate in global frameworks such as GMES and GEO. We do that also to advocate the design and realisation of better satellites that can meet the specific requirements of disaster reduction and development.

Although the cost of generating and using this information is decreasing steadily, too many countries cannot yet afford these important tools. What is worse, many of them rank among the most vulnerable in the world. That is why UNOSAT has launched a Global Grant Mapping Facility. This initiative is intended to facilitate the transfer of maps, technology and training to developing countries at risk with the support of a donor base that is increasing constantly. The ultimate aim is building sound and durable capacities in these countries. We feel that this is the best way to fulfil the recommendations of the General Assembly on disaster reduction while putting into practice the spirit of the ISDR and giving substance to the global frameworks I have mentioned earlier on.

Mr. President,

UNOSAT has so far accumulated first hand experience on a range of valuable solutions for disaster reduction at the community level, some of which have been developed in close collaboration with ESA in the framework of the EOMD and GMES programmes. We have extracted policy guidelines from these experiences, which we want to share with the disaster reduction community. These principles guide our collaboration efforts with other sister agencies. To mention the most important ones:

- The need for **systematic** evaluation of vulnerability and calculation of risk
- The generation of **interoperable** data, maps and services that be **used** by people

- The **Integration** of systems capabilities so to create a global network of knowledge and **usable** information

Keeping this in mind, we are therefore discussing with UNESCO, ESA and several other partners an advanced operational framework for action called SAFER. This is a contribution open to interested parties whose purpose is to structure long term cooperation to improve space tools so that we can carry out our collective mission of implementing the millennium goals, for which disaster reduction is a condition of success.

Mr. President,

Since UNITAR operates in partnership with UNOPS in this specific area, I was requested by the Executive Director of UNOPS to convey to this venue the support of UNOPS to disaster reduction and its systematic implementation in developing countries. UNOPS has a long history of collaboration with IDNDR and ISDR and prides itself of this partnership that has already led to important successes like in the case of the post Mitch vulnerability reduction programme in Matagalpa, Nicaragua. I should mention that this pilot project receives the support of Switzerland via the Canton of Geneva, for which we are very grateful.

I Thank you for your attention.

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