

Address by Junichiro Koizumi
Prime Minister of Japan
At the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction

Kobe, Japan
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(Provisional Translation)

Mr. Chairperson,

Mr. Jan Egeland, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs,
Honorable national delegates, and distinguished participants,

Thank you for traveling from all over the world to participate in this UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction. You are visiting here in Kobe, a city with rich historical and cultural atmosphere, and so as many other neighboring cities in the region. I sincerely hope that all of you take this opportunity to visit around as much as possible and obtain deeper understanding of Japan.

The earthquake and tsunami that struck in the waters off Sumatra Island in Indonesia last month have wrought an unprecedented level of damage on the countries around the Indian Ocean. I would like to express my deepest condolences to the families of those who perished in that disaster and my sincerest sympathy to all of the nations and people who have been affected by this terrible tragedy. I would also like to express my heartfelt appreciation to all of the professionals and volunteers of the governments, international organizations, and NGOs who are courageously working on recovery and rehabilitation activities in the disaster-stricken regions.

Immediately after the tsunami dealt its terrible blow, Japan deployed vessels and helicopters of Maritime Self-Defense Forces that were on duty nearby to Phuket Island in Thailand for conducting search and rescue activities. Japan Disaster Relief Teams including medical teams were also sent into the affected countries to conduct relief operations. We now have plans to further strengthen our efforts there with activities to support transportation and to improve sanitary conditions. Japan has also pledged as immediate assistance US\$500 million in grant aid and is now consulting with the relevant nations about the moratorium of the debt payments of the disaster-stricken countries. Japan is

also making great efforts to protect children, who are the most in need of emergency assistance. As a fellow Asian partner, Japan will take a leading role in carrying out recovery and rehabilitation in the affected countries.

In Japan it is said that "Disasters strike when you least expect them." We have learned this lesson from the bitter experience of having repeatedly lost numerous lives after unexpected earthquakes, typhoons, volcanic eruptions, and other disasters.

Did you know that the word "tsunami," which is now being used worldwide, is a Japanese word? This is indicative of the extent to which Japan has been subject to frequent tsunami disasters in the past.

In Japan, stories about the heroic efforts of a particular village chief following a massive earthquake and the resulting tsunami about 150 years ago are still being told today. This man noticed that immediately after the earthquake, the tide receded from the shoreline of his village out into the ocean. Remembering stories that had been passed down from his grandfather's generation, he realized that this was certainly an indication that a tsunami was on its way. No time should be wasted. He immediately lit a bundle of reaped sheaves of rice on fire and used it as a signal to gather the villagers and lead them to higher ground. Because of this rapid decision and action, many of the villagers were saved from the tsunami when it struck. After this event, the chief who saved the village used all of his own money to work with his fellow villagers on building a large seawall along the village's coastline. The seawall they built saved many lives when another tsunami struck that same village about 90 years later.

This story teaches us the importance of disaster reduction measures, such as remembering what we know and have been taught about disasters, quickly making decisions and actions, and always making everyday efforts to be prepared for an emergency situation.

Japan has experienced numerous disasters since then and has learned many lessons from them. Just 10 years ago, the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake struck here in Hyogo, causing massive destruction that resulted in the loss of more than 6,400 lives. Since that earthquake, the government and private sectors have been working together to promote the development of communities that are better able to withstand disasters. They have also been working to

expand and strengthen the immediate response structures of the national government and the support capabilities of relevant institutions.

The various volunteers who came from all over Japan and around the world in response to this massive earthquake made contributions of a magnitude that was unparalleled in Japanese history and gave Japanese society an opportunity to see the importance of their role. Many regions in Japan faced disasters just last year, like typhoons, heavy storms, and the Niigata earthquake, that inflicted a great deal of damage on many citizens. In these instances, too, the support of many volunteers penetrated local communities and played an extremely significant role in the recovery and rehabilitation of the affected areas.

As a result of our experience, we have learned many disaster reduction lessons that we can share with the international community. In Papua New Guinea, where approximately 2,600 people perished in the 1998 Aitape earthquake and tsunami, many people died near the coastline after the quake. Immediately afterwards, Japanese experts (at Asian Disaster Reduction Center) produced easy-to-understand tsunami disaster reduction pamphlets and the national government worked to distribute them and raise awareness among the people living in coastal communities. These efforts were rewarded in 2000 when a magnitude 8 earthquake again struck the country. Although several thousand homes were destroyed in the earthquake, no lives were lost in the resulting tsunami.

In the Maldives, high waves that were generated by a cyclone in 1987 flooded one-thirds of the capital, Male Island. Thus, with financial assistance from Japan, a seawall was built. This seawall successfully protected the capital of Male from the recent tsunami, leaving it virtually unharmed and thus saving many lives.

In 1960, a tsunami caused by a magnitude 9.5 earthquake off the coast of Chile traveled half way around the globe to arrive the next day along Japan's Pacific coast. The waves caused a tremendous amount of damage and left 139 people either dead or missing. In regions that could be hit by a tsunami, it is important to prevent the loss of life by developing plans for rapid evacuation. Thus, systems for quickly notifying relevant countries that an earthquake has occurred and a tsunami is approaching are extremely effective. Based on what

was learned from these lessons, a tsunami warning system was established for the Pacific region.

It will also be possible to save many lives in future Indian Ocean tsunamis if early warning mechanisms are rapidly developed for that region. In cooperation with the relevant countries, international organizations and other stakeholders, Japan proposed a special session at this conference for addressing this issue. This session will discuss the specific framework for an international tsunami warning mechanism, and cooperation for educating and raising awareness among citizens, etc. Based on the discussions here, we are ready to assist the establishment of such mechanism through bilateral cooperation and support for UNESCO and other international organizations. To this end, Japan will, as an immediate action, implement training courses through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and also make financial contribution to the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR).

September 1 has been designated as Disaster Prevention Day in Japan. During the Disaster Reduction Week incorporating this day, more than 3.5 million people, including myself, participate in disaster preparedness drills all over the country. The repetitive implementation of disaster preparedness drills not only for those involved in disaster reduction work, but among the general populace as well, is extremely important for minimizing damage when an actual disaster occurs. A continuous crustal activity monitoring network to offer information on earthquake predictions is being constructed in the regions of Japan that have been designated as being likely to experience a major earthquake in the near future. If desirable, we would very much like to take an active role in introducing these kinds of noteworthy disaster preparedness measures to others.

As described in the materials that have been handed out to you, we are pouring our energy into such international cooperative efforts as:

- launching "Initiative for Disaster Reduction through ODA" and further support for capacity-building on disaster reduction in developing countries,
- the strengthening of ties with neighboring countries in the area of disaster reduction cooperation through the Asian Disaster Reduction Center in Kobe, and
- the creation of a UN database of worldwide disaster recovery case studies.

Mr. Chairperson,

We are living in a time marked by conflicts and tensions derived from racial, religious, and cultural differences all over the world. Nonetheless, isn't it the common desire of all humankind to prepare against natural disasters, which can strike anywhere in the world, and to prevent damage and loss of human life? We need to overcome our conflicts and tensions, and help one another in a spirit of cooperation to achieve recovery and rehabilitation from disasters. We must fairly extend a helping hand to people who live in a wide range of circumstances. After the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake as well as the earthquake that struck last year, Japan received compassionate support from governments, companies, and individuals in countries around the world. Many people in Japan are grateful for this support and will always remember it. The city of Kobe, where we are holding this conference, suffered massive earthquake damage across a wide area 10 years ago, but since then, thanks to support from both at home and abroad, this city has traveled bravely down the road to recovery. As we proceed with this conference, then, I invite all of you to join me in putting our heads together on ways to further intensify our cooperative efforts to reduce the damage caused by natural disasters.

Finally, let me conclude my statement by saying that Japan will spare no effort in promoting the highest level of international cooperation on the sharing of information and knowledge, the contribution of human resources and technical support, and financial recovery support.

Thank you for your attention.