



World Conference on Disaster Reduction

18-22 January 2005, Kobe, Hyogo, Japan

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Remembering Kobe - ten years later

Just ten years ago, on 17 January 1995, the city of Kobe was struck by a huge earthquake that killed 6,433 people and injured more than 40,000 people in 20 seconds. The earthquake was a traumatic experience for Japan and its people who realized too late that they were not prepared for such a massive quake.

"At the time, people living in Kobe were more familiar with landslides and the risks posed by the nearby Rokko mountain range but they did not know a lot about earthquakes," says Satoru Nishikawa, Director for Disaster Preparedness of Japan's Cabinet Office. "Now they know. We have learnt a great deal since 1995 and we have since invested a lot in education and preparedness measures to improve our resilience to disasters."

The World Conference on Disaster Reduction, that will open tomorrow – Tuesday 18 January 2005 – in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan, is no mere coincidence. Japan is hosting the event one day after the tenth anniversary of the Great Hanshin-Awaji earthquake, which serves as a reminder of the importance of reducing risk and vulnerability to all kinds of natural hazards.

"Japan has a great deal of experience in earthquakes and in many other natural hazards such as typhoons, floods and tropical storms. It has a wealth of knowledge to share with other countries and regions around the world," says Salvano Briceño, Director of the secretariat for the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. "Examples of such good practices are earthquake resistant port construction methods, soil conservation, early warning systems, coastline protection initiatives and seismic retrofitting techniques of bridges.

"The fact that the World Conference is taking place in Asia is all the more relevant, Mr. Briceño said. "Asia is the most disaster-prone continent in the world, before Africa and the Americas. Half the casualties resulting from disasters since 1994 have occurred in Asia."

More than 4,000 participants from 150 countries will be gathering tomorrow at Kobe, Hyogo, Japan for the World Conference on Disaster Reduction.

"Three weeks after the tsunami in the Indian Ocean, people realized the importance of having a good early warning system. We very much hope that the Conference will come up with concrete results and a strong plan of action for reducing disaster losses over the next ten years, said Mr. Briceño. "The Conference has attracted numerous Ministers from around forty countries, which is a clear indication that Governments are increasingly aware of the need to include reducing disaster risk in their local, regional and national policies."



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