



World Conference on Disaster Reduction
18-22 January 2005, Kobe, Hyogo, Japan

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UN CONFERENCE ON DISASTER REDUCTION CONCLUDES; ADOPTS PLAN OF ACTION FOR NEXT TEN YEARS

Participants commit to reducing vulnerabilities to natural hazards

Kobe, Hyogo, Japan - - The World Conference on Disaster Reduction concluded here today with countries pledging to reduce the risks facing millions of people who are exposed to natural disasters. Taking place less than one month after the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster that claimed up to 230,000 lives, the conference heard numerous voices from around the globe pledging to create a safer world.

“We have achieved a good framework for action which represents a substantive set of objectives to ensure that the world reduces risk and vulnerabilities to natural hazards in the next ten years”, said Jan Egeland, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.

At the closing session today of the world conference 168 delegations adopted a framework for action calling on states to put disaster risk at the center of political agendas and national policies. The “Hyogo Framework for Action: 2005 – 2015” will strengthen the capacity of disaster-prone countries to address risk and invest heavily in disaster preparedness. “This new plan will help reduce the gap between what we know and what we do; the critical ingredient is political commitment”, said Mr. Egeland.

Speaking at the closing session of the week-long session, the President of the Conference Yoshitaka Murata, said “these five days spent in Kobe will make a real difference in the way we look at hazards, at risks and vulnerability, and that we all truly engage on the road for a safer world”.

The conference also adopted a declaration recommending, among other things, that a “culture of disaster prevention and resilience” must be fostered at all levels” and recognizing the relationship between disaster reduction, sustainable development and poverty reduction.



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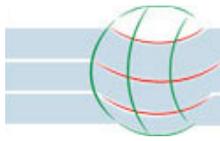
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These non-binding documents will serve as a “blue print” to guide nations and individuals to build disaster-resilient communities. Building on the commitments forged in Yokohama, Japan ten years ago, the renewed plan calls on the international community to pursue an integrated multi-hazard approach for sustainable development to reduce the incidents and severity of disasters.

“Time is short, the task is huge. Progress is contingent on partnerships on working together to meet this global challenge”, stated Mr. Egeland at the closing session of the world gathering.

Partnerships launched in Kobe will call for United Nations agencies involved in disaster reduction to work closely with civil society and governments to create major initiatives to mitigate the effects of natural hazards on vulnerable populations.

Special thematic segments were also held under the aegis of the conference at which time subjects such as good governance, environmental management and education, among other things, were raised. “Experts worked closely with governments in thematic segments which produced a very substantive set of specific guidelines and targets for the next ten years that will be further developed by the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), said Sálvamo Briceño, Director of the ISDR.

An International Early Warning Programme was launched to improve resilience to all types of natural hazards including droughts, wildland fires, floods, typhoons, hurricanes, landslides, volcanic eruption and tsunamis. This UN initiative will include wider information flow and emphasize the importance of people-centered early warning systems and community education about disaster preparedness.

In response to last month’s tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean, a special session was held at the World Conference where delegates pledged their support to create a regional tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean emphasizing the importance of international and regional cooperation. The new warning system will draw from the experience of the Pacific Ocean tsunami early warning systems making use of the existing coordination mechanism of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.



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An international flood initiative was also launched to better prepare communities living in areas affected by this type of natural hazard. This plan will be coordinated at the training and research center in Tsukuba, Japan, and will look at flood risk mitigation integrating not only operational aspects but also social implications.

The creation of an open Alliance to support Earthquake Risk Reduction and Earthquake Megacities Initiative was also announced which will bring together municipality officials from “megacities” around the world to develop city disaster management plans.

A partnership of government, UN agencies and specialized academic institutions also resulted from discussions here. “A Coalition on Education” led by UNESCO will take the lead to incorporate disaster reduction education into school programmes and to make school buildings safer.

“The world may not be a safer place next week but that is when we will have to start working together to ensure that commitments made at this event become a reality”, said Mr. Egeland.

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