

**Statement by Mr. John Horekens, EWC III Conference Coordinator, at the opening session of the Mayors' Conference on Early Warning (Bonn, 26 March 2006)**

Madam Mayor,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to join you at this Mayors' Conference on Early Warning, ahead of the Third International Conference on Early Warning convened by the Government of Germany, under the auspices of the United Nations. Allow me first to congratulate you on the initiative you have taken, Madam, to seize the opportunity of the EWC III to bring together mayors from around the world to discuss issues of very direct concern to all of you, as elected leaders of communities living with risk.

A little over a year ago, the international community adopted the Hyogo Framework for Action at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, in Kobe, in which the place of early warning figures prominently as an important element of disaster risk reduction. The focus that has been sharpened since then on early warning is that of a multi-hazard, people-centred approach. Indeed, early warning is not a rhetorical concept for intellectual discussions: it is the reality of life for millions of people around the globe, a practical notion for those who face hazards in their daily lives. It combines elements inextricably related: risk awareness, monitoring, communication, and response capacity. The challenge is to maintain the constant link between those elements to make sure that a warning system actually works. At the users' end, if I may say, the community leaders have a particularly heavy responsibility.

A perfect plan is useless if it is not implemented; the value of early warning is in the entirety of the elements of a system. The real test of early warning is at the ground level, in the communities, on the front line. As front-line practitioners, you know that if your communities are not familiar with the details of an alert call or of an evacuation plan, your warning systems will prove to have failed in saving lives and property. As leading members of communities, you know that you have a responsibility to ensure that all elements of the chain are intimately linked, that they are well canvassed, and that the trigger is perfectly connected to the rest of the system. Your presence here today proves the importance of the people-centred approach and the validity of focusing on the community.

The United Nations secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction has developed an expertise in early warning through its close collaboration with the German government. In supporting the creation here in Bonn -- thank you for the hospitality, Madam Mayor -- of the Platform for the Promotion of Early Warning, Germany has demonstrated a firm commitment to the cause of disaster risk reduction. This was, incidentally, a tangible follow-up action of the Second Early Warning Conference, also held in Bonn, almost three years ago. In financing the Platform and its activities, in particular the International Programme for Early Warning, Germany supports the international community's efforts in making the world a safer place.

The Third International Conference on Early Warning that starts tomorrow will attempt to illustrate, through specific projects, good practices in early warning, in all continents and for all categories of hazards. The idea behind this conference of demonstrating that "early warning works" is in direct symbiosis with your preoccupations as mayors. What you want is not only the technology and the knowledge, but the means to convert them into practical

measures that will allow you to discharge your responsibility vis-à-vis your constituencies. In preparing for the conference, we have had your preoccupations in mind, we have endeavoured to bring together people and subjects that will help you find answers to the very real questions you face in your everyday work. The success of the conference will be measured with the good responses that you will take home with you, to your people, to make them more resilient to risk and to disaster. Your conference here today will bring to the surface some of the real questions that will have to be addressed tomorrow. The conclusions that will result from your work will place those questions squarely to the international community, and the message that you will convey at the beginning of the conference should seek guidance and support for your endeavours in helping your cities and townships to live in greater safety.

The conference of Mayors today is a brilliant way to set the scene for tomorrow. I am honoured to have been conveyed to share a few moments with you, and count on you to steer the debates today and during the next three days towards the real issues that the international community, the national governments and the local communities need to address – moving from good concepts to decisive action.

I wish you much success in your deliberations today.