

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the EWC-III?

The basic aims of the Third International Conference on Early Warning are:

- to identify unused potentials in all areas of early warning,
- to identify and launch specific exemplary early warning projects and illustrate how best to bridge gaps,
- to stimulate discussion and action toward concrete follow-up projects, and
- to discuss proposals for global early warning systems.

The conference will comprise two parallel but connected streams: a 'Priorities and Projects Forum', concerned with good practice and the presentation of projects; and a 'Scientific and Technical Symposium' on state-of-the-art knowledge and assessment of potential in early warning systems.

The conference will bring together donors and implementing agencies, with an innovative feature being the aim to launch specific projects on early warning, concentrating on high-priority countries and issues. The focus should be on tailored comprehensive national early warning projects, and priority themes for global early warning advancement initiatives. This approach will advance regional and international cooperation, in line with the Hyogo Framework for Action, adopted at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe in January 2005.

The selection of projects will be undertaken through a search for proposals in all regions of the world, using the regional mechanisms of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Disaster Reduction (IATF/DR) and of the secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR). Themes and criteria will be defined in July, so as to initiate the search for suitable projects. For reasons of time, only a limited number can be presented at the conference plenary as illustrations of best practice in early warning, but all eligible proposals will be collated in a portfolio of projects submitted to the conference, for appropriate review by interested parties, including donors. The list of themes and criteria will be posted on the conference's website during the summer.

Presentations will be invited for the symposium. The submission and acceptance process will also be announced on the conference website during the summer. If interest warrants, additional side events such as poster sessions, product displays and special topical events will be held.

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What is Early Warning?

Natural hazards, such as storms, droughts, volcanic eruptions or earthquakes, need not automatically spell disaster. Disaster strikes only if a community or population cannot cope with the effects of natural hazards it is exposed to. Torrential rain in the middle of an ocean does not cause a disaster, but the same heavy rainfall on a vulnerable population – for example a shantytown on the side of a hillside stripped of trees - may result in landslides and dramatic loss of life. A minor drought may cause a famine if a region's agricultural production is highly stressed by civil war. A community that lacks an early warning system may sleep while volcanic ash clouds bear down upon them. Vulnerability is the potent additive that mixes with natural hazards to cause disasters.

Early warning is a major element of disaster risk reduction. It is critically dependent of scientific knowledge and systems, and is more than just a prediction: a complete and effective early warning system comprises a chain of four elements:

- Prior knowledge by communities of the risks they face
- Technical monitoring and warning service for these risks
- The dissemination of understandable warnings to those at risk
- Knowledge and preparedness to act

Failure in any one part of the chain can mean breakdown of the whole system. Good early warning systems have strong linkages between the four elements. The major players concerned with the early warning chain meet regularly to ensure they understand all other segments and what other parties require from them. Risk scenarios are constructed and reviewed. Specific responsibilities throughout the chain are agreed and implemented. Past events are studied and improvements are made to the system. Manuals and procedures are agreed upon, published and publicized. Communities are consulted and information is disseminated. Operational procedures such as evacuations are practiced and tested.

Behind these activities lies a base of political support, laws and regulations, institutional responsibility and trained people. Early warning systems are established and supported as a matter of policy. Preparedness to respond is engrained in society but needs strengthening and support.

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Who is the EWC-III organised by?

The conference will be prepared through a mechanism of inter-related stakeholders:

The Federal Foreign Office in Germany has set up a *EWC III Task Force* to organize the conference in co-operation with:

- A *United Nations conference secretariat* based in Geneva with the secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), supported by ISDR's Bonn-based PPEW, that will manage the conference programme;
- A *German supporting committee* coordinated by the Bonn-based German national disaster reduction committee, DKKV, that will support the organizational work and logistics;
- A *consultative committee* composed of major stakeholders largely drawn from the Inter- Agency Task Force on Disaster Reduction, from governments and from technical groups, that will provide overall advice to the secretariat and the supporting committee;
- A *technical advisory committee* that will guide the preparations of the scientific symposium.

Who will participate in the EWC-III?

A broad range of experts from different sectors will participate in the EWC-III, including UN agencies and programmes, governments, non-governmental organizations, scientists, local authorities, academics, national government representatives, journalists, business people and others.

The conference will be opened by the German Federal Foreign Minister and the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs.

What are the expected outcomes of the EWC-III?

The conference aims at producing tangible results, through concrete projects, that can help national governments, local organizations and communities put in place mechanisms for early warning, and demonstrate the value of early warning to others.

During the preparatory work for the 2nd Conference on Early Warning, regional consultations in Asia and the Pacific drew attention to the high risk of devastating tsunamis in that region, and to the importance of filling gaps in early warning systems. But the knowledge of the risk and the vulnerabilities is

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not enough: the challenge is to build mechanisms that can avert disasters. Several international and national leaders and bodies have called for early warning systems for all hazards and all countries. One year after the deadly tsunami in the Indian Ocean, the 3rd Conference on Early Warning is the opportunity to address the practical measures needed to set up effective mechanisms.

The 3rd Conference on Early Warning will include a scientific/technical symposium to support a systematic assessment of unused potential in the areas of early warning and to debate issues associated with global early warning systems. Abstracts for presentations and posters can be submitted to the conference secretariat. A selection will take place led by the scientific advisory board to the conference. The conference preparations will incorporate processes to define projects and initiatives, to transparently establish the priorities, and to engage potential donors from the outset. A selection structure will be put in place by the secretariat to ensure appropriate assessment of the projects' quality and potential impact, and proper regional balance.

What is the ISDR?

The United Nations adopted the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) to build on the vital work of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (1990-99).

The ISDR aims at building disaster resilient communities by promoting increased awareness of the importance of disaster reduction as an integral component of sustainable development, with the goal of reducing human, social, economic and environmental losses due to natural hazards and related technological and environmental disasters.

The ISDR promotes four objectives as tools towards reaching disaster reduction for all:

- Increase public awareness to understand risk, vulnerability and disaster reduction globally
- Obtain commitment from public authorities to implement disaster reduction policies and actions
- Stimulate interdisciplinary and intersectoral partnerships, including the expansion of risk reduction networks
- Improve scientific knowledge about disaster reduction

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The ISDR combines the strengths of many key players through the Inter-Agency Task Force on Disaster Reduction (IATF/DR); it is supported by the ISDR secretariat (UN/ISDR).

In 2004, with the support from the German Government, UN/ISDR established in Bonn the Platform for the Promotion of Early Warning (PPEW). (Cont.: Reid)

What is PPEW?

The Platform for the Promotion of Early Warning (PPEW) was established in 2004 by UN/ISDR with the support of the Government of Germany, following the recommendation of the Second International Conference on Early Warning (EWC-II) held in Bonn, 2003. Its overall aim is to reduce the growing impacts of disasters through more effective early warning systems.

PPEW promotes international action toward the development of systematic, technically sound, people centred early warning and preparedness systems. It advocates for better early warning systems and the integration of technical early warning capacities into policy and practice, especially in development assistance policy and programs, collects disseminates information on best practices, and stimulates cooperation among early warning actors and the development of new ways to advance early warning systems.

PPEW strongly supports the concept of systematic people centred early warning systems which comprises four key elements:

- Prior knowledge of the risks faced by communities
- Technical monitoring and warning service for these risks
- Dissemination of understandable information and warnings to those at risk
- Knowledge by people of how to react and capacity to do so

Current PPEW projects include supporting the development of the tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean region and coordinating a global survey of early warning systems for the UN Secretary General Mr Kofi Annan.

What is the DKKV?

The German Committee for Disaster Reduction (DKKV) is a key contributor to the implementation of the ISDR, acting as a focal point for disaster reduction within Germany and serving as an interface between the national and international levels within the Strategy.

National participation is one of the primary elements for sub-regional, regional and international cooperation within the ISDR. Within any given country there are numerous groups that have a role to play in reducing the impacts of

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Press Information

hazards, such as the humanitarian, meteorological, developmental, environmental and agricultural sectors. DKKV plays a key role in harmonising efforts towards reducing risk and vulnerability, in order that the people of Germany are in a better position to become resilient to disasters.

Where and when does the EWC-III take place?

The EWC-III will take place 27-29 March 2006 at the Internationales Kongresszentrum Bundeshaus Bonn (IKBB) in Bonn, Germany.

Press activities

EWC-III opening ceremony and press conference

Monday 27 March

Opening ceremony 09:45-11:00

Press conference: 11:00

EWC-III closing ceremony (presentation of Early Warning Programme/Conference Statement) and press conference

Wednesday 29 March

Closing ceremony: 12:00-13:00

Press conference to be determined

Press services

A press area will be available on-site (round circular room under main staircase) at the IKBB throughout the EWC-III, providing press kits and additional information materials, agenda of scheduled press conferences and daily events, assistance with interview requests, separate interview room, and internet/PC facilities.

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