



UNITED NATIONS



**International Coordination Meeting for the Development of a Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System for the Indian Ocean within a global framework
UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, France, 3-8 March 2005**

**Opening Statement by *Sálvano Briceño*, Director,
Inter-agency secretariat of the International
Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR)**

3 March 2005

Director-General, colleagues, distinguished participants,

It is only two months ago that coastal communities and tourists from around the world were hit by the tsunami in the Indian Ocean. In this short time frame, a great deal of solidarity from within the affected countries and internationally has been demonstrated by providing relief to the survivors and support to those mourning their lost ones.

The United Nations through the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has played an essential role in the coordination of the relief efforts and we now face the challenges of ensuring the transition into recovery and rehabilitation, with a sustainable risk reduction approach.

These two months have also allowed for substantive reflection on the lessons learnt from the disaster and in particular what measures are needed to avoid events like this occurring again.

Immediately following the disaster, the need for a tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean was identified. Such a system has now been requested by the affected countries at meetings in Jakarta, Delhi, Beijing, Phuket and in the UN General Assembly resolution A/RES/59/279 on Strengthening Emergency Relief, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Prevention in the Aftermath of the Indian Ocean Tsunami Disaster.

The topic was also high on the agenda of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe-Hyogo (WCDR, 18-22 January 2005) where a Common Statement was made by Governments.

Importantly, the recognition that an early warning system could have saved many lives if it had been in place prior to 26 December was amplified by strong calls for development of strategies for disaster risk reduction in the region as an essential element of broader efforts to increase resilience to future hazards.

Breaking new grounds, commitments were made and resources provided, as part of humanitarian efforts following a disaster to ensure that disaster risk reduction is recognized as an integral part of the longer-term recovery efforts and sustainable development.

A core component of this endeavor is the fact that regional tsunami early warning systems must be tailored to the specific circumstances and the individual requirements of the countries of the Indian Ocean. Those countries must be the ones to determine the shape and nature of the regional system building on and linking national capacities.

This, of course, also applies to the development of similar capacities in other regions at risk, such as the Caribbean, Mediterranean, Pacific, etc., which should also be at the core of our concerns during the coming days, weeks and months.

We also need to ensure that the relevant elements of an effective early warning system are integrated, cohesive, and can be utilized to cover not only tsunamis but also other hazards such as cyclones and floods.

The successful support of a regional early warning system as well as the national and local implementation of disaster risk reduction goes beyond the mandate of any one institution. The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) provides an appropriate framework to address the wider risk reduction perspective. The ISDR comprises relevant UN agencies, regional organizations and civil society partners.

Governments at Kobe and other recent meetings have requested that the ISDR framework and mechanisms be utilized to facilitate this process, with the first task being to support the efforts of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of UNESCO in coordinating the set-up of regional tsunami early warning systems.

We are also developing, with partners, a matrix of roles and functions to address the numerous tasks ahead of us. This distribution of tasks should be fully complementary to the functions identified to support the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action in the Indian Ocean and other regions.

We now have a common challenge, to ensure that we respond to the needs of the countries and build understanding, solidarity and commitment to improve early warning systems and to reduce disaster risk.

This gathering in Paris is an important step towards a consolidated plan for a tsunami warning system for the Indian Ocean as part of broader efforts of strengthening capacities for tsunamis in other regions and to increase resilience under the framework of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

As you will be aware, the Secretary-General has appointed President Bill Clinton as his Special Representative, in order to sustain the political will of the international community to support medium- and long-term rehabilitation, reconstruction and risk reduction efforts

following the 26 December tsunami. I can share with you that during initial consultations this week in New York, the Special Representative's office stressed the importance of this area of work and expressed his interest in supporting these activities as part of his mandate.

Let me finish by reiterating that the ISDR secretariat looks forward to continuing our joint efforts with all of you, and would like to thank UNESCO in particular for their warm hospitality today, as well as the strong spirit of partnership shown throughout this challenging endeavor.

I will unfortunately not be able to stay for the rest of the meeting, due to other commitments, but my colleague Reid Basher the head of the Platform for the Promotion of Early Warning (PPEW) and several other colleagues will be here during all the meeting.

Thank you for your attention and I wish for a very productive meeting.