

GLOBAL PLATFORM FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCION
– Resilience Dividend: Towards Sustainable and Inclusive Societies –
– Geneva, 15 – 17 May 2019 –

Ralf Ernst,
Deputy Co-ordinator / Head, Environmental Activities
Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities
Organization for Co-operation and Security in Europe (OSCE)

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear colleagues,

It is a great honour for me to speak here today at this important conference.

The Organization for Co-operation and Security in Europe (OSCE) is the world's largest regional security organization, with 57 participating States across North-America, Europe and Asia. Within its comprehensive approach to security, the OSCE addresses disaster risks from different perspectives and at different levels – from the regional to the national and community levels.

There is a strong need for mainstreaming a security perspective into disaster risk reduction and there is ample room for deepening the understanding of the complex links between security and disasters, including disasters prompted by climate change. We would like to highlight four main factors for consideration in relation to the disasters and security nexus:

First, “**disasters are potential contributors to, or aggravators of, conflicts**”: Disasters have the potential to lead to increased tensions and aggravate existing conflicts. Furthermore, disaster-induced migration and displacement of persons can create tensions in neighboring areas.

Second, “**conflicts are disaster risk escalators**”: Conflicts tend to decrease authorities' capacity to manage disaster risks, and at the same time can affect people's vulnerability to disasters. These conditions have the potential to further aggravate political instability.

Third, “**transboundary impacts of disasters**”: Disasters affect security and stability in a transboundary context which calls for bilateral and regional co-operation in preparedness and prevention as well as in response and recovery efforts.

And, last but not least, “**Disaster risk reduction as a tool for conflict prevention and confidence building**”: Addressing disaster-related challenges can provide an opportunity to foster co-operation within societies and across boundaries. Co-operation in disaster risk reduction can serve as a useful tool in diminishing tensions as part of a broader effort to prevent conflicts, build mutual confidence and promote good neighbourly relations.

Starting with the **Helsinki Final Act of 1975**, disaster-related challenges are referred to in a number of OSCE policy documents. The **2014 Basel Ministerial Council Decision on Enhancing Disaster Risk Reduction** provides a strong basis for OSCE’s continued engagement in this field. Building on this mandate, the OSCE has been actively engaged in promoting regional co-operation and strengthening capacities of its participating States on wildfire management, flood risk reduction, community-based disaster risk reduction as well as in addressing security implications of climate change.

Examples are our current work on **wildfire management** with OSCE participating States in the South Caucasus, Eastern Europe and the Western Balkan region. Wildfires are a recurring disaster threat for countries in these regions that is expected to be aggravated by climate change.

One of the key topics of this conference and for the future work of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction is the issue of **risk-informed public and private investments**. In this respect, I would like to refer to our work on disaster risk reduction in the context of protecting critical energy infrastructure.

Extreme weather conditions, aggravated through the effects of climate change, as well as fires, earthquakes and floods, but also man-made disasters and cyber terrorism are posing increasing threats to critical energy infrastructure. The OSCE has responded to these threats by gathering best practices, management tools and guidelines from the public and private sector, academia and civil society in the OSCE guidebook on “**Protecting Electricity**

Networks from Natural Hazards". The document was published in 2017 and is available in English, Russian and Arabic.

In cooperation with the Slovak 2019 OSCE Chairmanship, as well as other participating States, we are currently developing a **Virtual Competency and Training Centre for Critical Energy Networks Protection**. This Centre will serve as a comprehensive training tool and knowledge hub for experts from the OSCE region, and potentially from other countries, in risk management and mitigation principles to raise resilience of critical energy networks. In this initiative, the OSCE will develop collaboration with leading academic and research institutions as well as the private sector in this field.

Thank you for your attention.