



International Day for Disaster Reduction and



World Habitat Day

13 October 2011

Regional Celebrations

Welcome Address

By Knut Ostby, UN Resident Coordinator



World Habitat Day

3 October 2011

Excellencies,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On Behalf of the United Nations family, I have the pleasure to welcome you all to the Regional Celebrations of two important Days in our yearly calendar: one being the International Day for Disaster Reduction - celebrated today, on 13 October, around the world by Governments, community leaders, civil society and our many ISDR system partners; and the other being World Habitat Day, which was commemorated earlier this month on 3rd October.

We are commemorating both awareness days jointly, to highlight that disaster risk reduction and human settlement issues are closely related. Urbanization and unplanned human settlements are amongst the key factors exposing an increasing number of people and assets to the devastating impacts of natural disasters. The UN Secretary General provided some compelling evidence for this in his global message for this Day when he referred to “sixty million people [that] now live within one meter of sea level. By the end of the century, that number will jump to 130 million”. The Pacific is hence not alone in having to find solutions to climate change and the serious threats posed by storm surges, floods and other extreme weather events.

The International Day for Disaster Reduction 2011 provides an occasion to focus on how, together, we can continue to reduce disaster risk. This year's theme for the Day highlights the role of **children and youth** as active partners - calling on them to **'Step Up for Disaster Risk Reduction!'** I look forward hearing from the many school children and youth representatives who are here with us this morning to take part in the 'Step Up!' initiative, about how you think the Pacific can be better prepared for disasters and climate change.

Damaged and destroyed schools, or the loss of household assets are just some of the impacts children and young people are experiencing when disaster strikes. The disruption to their normal routine may result in poorer educational performance and greater risk of disease. As a response to this, in the Cook Islands, Fiji, the Solomon Islands, and elsewhere in the Pacific, schoolchildren are already taught the basics of natural hazards and their impacts, as well as how to keep their home and community safe.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our children and youth are ready to become active partners in disaster reduction and climate change adaptation. As our leaders of tomorrow, they have much to contribute in shaping the agenda for the future; and they want to get involved in decision-making, institutional arrangements, policy making and implementation processes.

The UN Secretary General today in his message to the International Day for Disaster Reduction reminds us that "more than 600 African, Asian and Latin American young boys and girls developed a Children's Charter to reduce disaster risk". The Charter has five main points:

- 1) Schools must be safe and education must be uninterrupted after a disaster event;
- 2) Child protection must be a priority, before, during and after a disaster;
- 3) Children have the right to participate and to access information on disaster risks;

- 4) Community infrastructure must be safe, and relief and reconstruction must help reduce future risk; and
- 5) Disaster risk reduction must reach the most vulnerable.

Placing greater attention to the needs of children and youth in local level measures to reduce disaster and climate related risks, also forms part of the 10 'Essentials for Making Cities and Communities Resilient'. **Community resilience in the Pacific** is therefore the second main thread of our 'Day Celebrations' this morning. The '10 Essentials' are promoted through the World Disaster Reduction Campaign which is implemented over a 5 year period from 2010-2015 with the support from the secretariat of the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

I am particularly pleased that we do have an opportunity for Lami Town, which is participating in the *Making Cities and Communities Resilient Campaign*, and in *UN-Habitat's Cities and Climate Change Initiative*, to share with us some of the good work they are doing in actively engaging the community, women, young people and the private sector in disaster reduction. We are also pleased to admit the towns of Suva, Nausori and Rakiraki as new members to the group of campaign cities.

Talking about the role of local government, ladies and gentlemen, is bringing us back to World Habitat Day and its 2011 theme "*Cities and Climate Change*". The theme was chosen because climate change has become one of the greatest development challenges for our towns and cities in the 21st century. The UN Secretary General in his message on World Habitat Day said "Local efforts are critical to success, but they must be supported by international initiatives. We have already seen progress, including the creation of the Climate Change Adaptation fund and [...] the action plan to Reduce Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, known as 'REDD plus'".

The **nexus between climate change and disaster risk reduction in the Pacific**, the third thread of running through our programme this morning, has been explored in a joint UNISDR/UNDP study to analyze the policy and

institutional arrangements for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. It provides compelling evidence for pursuing an integrated approach to both issues in the wider context of development. The findings are complemented by a report that specifically focuses on the impacts of climate change on children in the Pacific which was spearheaded by UNICEF. As a main bottom line we conclude that taking a holistic and development oriented approach to disasters strengthens the impact and makes interventions more effective.

As a global organization the UN can play an important role in encouraging the sharing of good ideas and useful experiences between countries and regions. UNDP calls this South-South Cooperation and one example of this is a project that draws together practitioners from the Pacific with counterparts from the Caribbean to find suitable solutions and ways to replicate best practices for addressing the various threats posed by climate change and disasters. Given the similarities between these two regions there is much to learn from each other about how communities cope and continue to find ways to meet the challenges of natural disasters that affect their daily lives.

Ladies and Gentlemen, children are excellent at looking at future needs and actions. We need to learn from them and join forces with them to make the Children's Charter a reality also here in the Pacific! Let us all invest today for a safer tomorrow.

Thank you very much.