

Press Release

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President of the UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction

UN Commission on Sustainable Development
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Mr. President,

Having served as the President of the UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction, I am pleased to have this opportunity today to present a report on that conference. The UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) was held on January 18 to 22 in the City of Kobe in Hyogo Prefecture, just when the region was commemorating the 10th anniversary of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. The conference attracted numerous high-ranking participants from all over the world, and proved to be a great success. We were tremendously pleased with the outcome.

The conference aimed to construct a guiding framework on disaster reduction for the 21st century, and facilitated the active preparations by various countries toward this end. At the end of last year, during the final stages of the conference preparations, the Indian Ocean disaster struck, wreaking an unparalleled magnitude of destruction on untold numbers of people in several nations. The passion exhibited by the conference participants for finding ways to overcome this tragedy and work toward rehabilitation were at the very heart of the event's success.

The five-day conference featured inter-governmental plenary as well as thematic sessions on specific topics, and provided an opportunity for participants to share valuable information and insights regarding global disaster reduction activities. As a result, participants adopted the "Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters" to guide the international community's disaster reduction efforts over the next decade. I would like to share with you four key points of this framework.

First, disasters pose a major obstacle to sustainable development, and absence of positive action only makes communities more vulnerable to experiencing more serious disasters in the future. Disaster reduction activities are a crucial component in achieving sustainable development. However, in many countries, investments for disaster reduction

are not assigned a very high priority. The Hyogo Framework establishes the importance of incorporating disaster reduction perspectives in all policies relevant to sustainable development.

The second key point is the importance of cultivating a culture of disaster prevention and resilience. We cannot prevent hazards from occurring, but we can protect our lives and livelihoods against the threats that they pose. In Japan, thousands of people perished in the series of strong typhoons in the 1940s and 1950s. From these tragic experiences, we came to recognize the importance of building measures for protecting people's lives and property into our national policies. We have therefore made efforts to strengthen disaster reduction systems, increase disaster reduction investments, and raise awareness of disaster reduction among the general public. As a result, the number of lives lost by typhoons has dramatically fallen in recent decades. However, serious damage is still caused by large earthquakes, like the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake in 1995. Japan has recently established the goal of reducing by half the damage caused by massive earthquakes over the next 10 years, and is striving to strengthen policies for reinforcing public facilities, like schools and hospitals, as well as people's homes against earthquakes. We need to focus more attention on the importance of advance preparations for reducing disaster risk.

Third, it is important that we strengthen disaster reduction awareness at the community level. The most effective defense in the face of a disaster is the community's disaster reduction capabilities. It is crucial that each member of the community assess the disaster risks to which their region is vulnerable, prepare for possible disasters, and take everyday preparedness measures that will enable them to take care of themselves and others around them in an emergency. In Japan it is said that "disasters strike just when you've forgotten about them," so we encourage people to participate in disaster education activities and preparedness drills.

The final point I would like to emphasize is that, as evidenced by the Indian Ocean disaster, disasters do not observe national boundaries. Nations and communities with similar disaster experiences need to share knowledge and technologies, and form broad partnerships with one another. We are promoting international cooperation on disaster reduction efforts with the other countries of Asia through the Asian Disaster Reduction Center, and are further strengthening international cooperation in accordance with our new initiative for disaster reduction through ODA. Even the Hyogo Framework for Action speaks to the importance of strengthening the role of regional organizations. At the conference, a video image showing how the flapping of a butterfly's wings can produce strong winds in faraway lands was aired. I am looking forward to seeing how the flapping of wings in Hyogo, in the form of appeals for the cultivation of disaster prevention cultures, will travel around the world and grow into massive contributions toward global sustainable development.

The conference featured a proposal by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and special sessions on the Indian Ocean disaster were held. Given the shared belief that the

existence of a tsunami early warning system in the region would have reduced the magnitude of the disaster, the conference agreed on a "Common Statement on the Special Session on the Indian Ocean Disaster." This promotes the strengthening of disaster reduction systems, including improvements to internal communications systems and disaster awareness efforts, and cooperation between relevant government agencies and institutions under the auspices of the UN.

After the conference, a variety of initiatives were promptly developed by the nations affected, donor nations, UNESCO, the ISDR Secretariat, and others. Over the past three months, coordination efforts aimed at the establishment of a tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean have been undertaken under the auspices of the UN. As an interim measure to serve in the period prior to the full-fledged operation of this system, Japan has been working with the US to provide countries in the region with tsunami advisory information. In response to the Sumatra earthquake of March 28, Japan and the US did so promptly to the relevant countries. As such, I believe the concrete progress after the conference is quite useful. To halt this kind of tragedy from occurring again in the future, it is important that each country adopt a balanced approach that includes developing its own self-protection capabilities and promoting international cooperation to support those efforts.

The themes of this Commission on Sustainable Development, water, sanitation, and human settlements, are closely intertwined with disaster reduction issues. Water is the source of life, but it is not equally accessible to everyone. Communities have to contend with droughts, floods, and water-related conflicts. Although all of these impede efforts toward sustainable development, we can help communities achieve a stable coexistence with water by imparting knowledge regarding the proper management of water resources and increasing efforts to reduce disaster risks over the long term.

The WCDR also identified rapid urbanization as a new disaster risk factor. In developing countries, as populations move rapidly into the cities, living environments expand haphazardly into areas that tend to be more vulnerable to disasters, increasing the disaster risk. It is not just nature, but human behavior, that is contributing to future vulnerability.

Given this, it is clearly important that disaster risk reduction perspectives be incorporated into a wide variety of fields. For this to happen, people involved in national governments, UN organizations, financial institutions, and other organizations are being asked to take concrete actions, befitting their capabilities and circumstances, for implementing and following up on the Hyogo Framework for Action. The Hyogo Declaration was also adopted by the conference as a call to action for all relevant stakeholders. I am very pleased to see that the Hyogo Framework was duly addressed in the recent report by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, as was the need to follow up on its goals.

People are all equal in the eyes of nature, and we therefore need to expand the cooperative efforts of the international community to protect human lives against the threat

of nature's wrath. We hope that our relentless efforts to implement the Hyogo Framework for Action over the next decade will produce a strong foundation that will allow us to hand down a safer world to the next generation. This commission has decided to address the theme of disaster management and vulnerability in 2014-15. I therefore exhort everyone here to reaffirm their commitment to disaster reduction, so that when that time comes, we will be able to see substantial reductions in global disaster damage and to report many positive achievements as a result of that framework.

Thank you for your attention.