



United Nations
International Strategy for Disaster Reduction

Meeting of the Committee on Development

Prevent or react? The EU approach to Disaster Risk Reduction

14 June 2011 - 15.30-17.00

Venue: European Parliament, room PHS 5B001

Background

The Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters reported that only in 2010, 372 disasters caused by natural hazards affected more than 207 million people, claimed 296,800 lives and caused USD 109 billion of economic damage. 2010 was one of the worst years of the last two decades in disaster fatalities - most of which were associated with the 12 January 2010 earthquake in Haiti that killed 222,570 people.

Global reinsurance companies estimate claims costs resulting from the Japanese earthquake and tsunami to be between USD 1.2 and 1.5 billion.¹

Many countries have now made commendable progress in reducing mortality risk, particularly with respect to weather related hazards. Unfortunately far less progress is being made in addressing other disaster losses and impacts. Damage to housing, local infrastructure and public assets such as schools and health facilities, is still rising.

The imperative to invest is not only economic, it is also political. While there has been a strong political incentive for disaster response, reducing and managing risks has been proven to be far more elusive.

We are still far from having empowered national governments adopting a disaster risk reduction approach in their daily undertakings. We need national governments to demand that development, environmental and humanitarian policies and practices be based on sound risk reduction measures.

The considerations above trigger the following reflections:

- **Do the UN and the EU have the right structure in place to coordinate preventive mechanisms? What more can be done by the EU to maximize its added-value in disaster prevention?**

Both the United Nations and the European Union are trying to obtain consensus on next steps based on consultations with their Member States. The third session of Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, which was held in Geneva from 8 to 13 May 2011, aimed to achieve much stronger political commitment to reducing risk through integrating disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation into development and planning policies. Similarly, in Europe, recent Ministerial

¹ Figures are based on estimates provided by Munich Re and Swiss Re, leading global re-insurance companies.

Conferences have contributed to increasing the political commitment for disaster risk reduction at the regional and sub-regional levels and to the integration of DRR as a core priority of key European institutions' mandate such as the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA), Council of Europe, the European Commission and the South East European cooperation. The European Union has taken the lead in addressing disaster prevention. In 2009, the European Commission issued a Communication 'A Community approach on the prevention of natural and man-made disasters'². This called for international cooperation and collaboration of actors involved in disaster management.

- **The economy of disasters: how can we get smarter with our money?**

A recent joint World Bank / UNISDR Report³ found that prevention is often possible and cost-effective and that government spending for prevention is normally lower than relief spending. The nature of spending is also crucial. The report gives the example of Bangladesh where the number of deaths from cyclones were reduced by spending modest amounts on operations such as building shelters and developing weather forecasts. These measures cost less than establishing large-scale embankments which would have been less effective and more costly. Therefore, investment for DRR at the European level must be integrated into EU policies and EU funding mechanisms to ensure a greater impact on disaster risk reduction.

Political will: from words to actions. What is the role of national governments within Europe in moving forward DRR policies?

The Mid Term Review of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA)2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters, launched in Rome on 9 March 2011,⁴ recommends that 'national and international institutions, including bilateral aid organizations and the United Nations, must integrate disaster risk reduction in their development, climate change adaptation environmental and humanitarian planning, execution and accountability frameworks to safeguard development gains and investments.' The HFA and the actions resulting from the EC Communication shall be aligned to maximize the long-term impacts of DRR efforts in Europe.

Speakers :

- Kristalina Georgieva, European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response
- Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative of the Secretary General for Disaster Risk Reduction
- Mr. Marcus Oxley, Chairman of the Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction

² http://ec.europa.eu/echo/civil_protection/civil/pdfdocs/com_2009_82en.pdf

³ The report can be found here :
<http://www.preventionweb.net/english/professional/publications/v.php?id=15136>

⁴ The Mid-Term Review can be found here : http://preventionweb.net/files/18197_midterm.pdf

Biographies

Margareta Wahlström

Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction

Ms. Wahlström was appointed as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction in November 2008.

Ms. Wahlström has over 30 years of extensive national and international experience in humanitarian relief operations in disaster and conflict areas, and in institution-building to strengthen national capacity for disaster preparedness, response and for risk reduction.

Previous appointments include:

- Member and Coordinator of the Independent Panel on Safety and Security of UN Personnel and Premises, Chaired by Mr. Lakhdar Brahimi, 2008
- Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator and Assistant-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2004-2008
- United Nations Special Coordinator for the Assistance to the Tsunami-Affected Communities, 2004-2005
- Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Relief, Recovery and Rehabilitation, United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), 2003-2004
- Under-Secretary-General for Disaster Response and Operations and Deputy Director Operations, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 1995-2000.

Marcus C. Oxley

Chairman of the Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction.

Marcus has over twenty years disaster risk management experience gained within the non-governmental sector where he was responsible for managing and implementing a range of disaster response, recovery, preparedness and mitigation programmes across Africa, Asia and Europe. In June 2007 he became the founding Chair of the Global Network of Civil Society Organisations for Disaster Reduction – a major international alliance of large and small civil society organisations committed to working together to put the voices and concerns of vulnerable people at the heart of global disaster risk reduction policy and practice.

Prior to joining the Global Network Marcus was a director with the UK-based INGO Tearfund where he had overall responsibilities for their disasters-related work and assumed a leading role in promoting and mainstreaming “pro-poor” DRR concepts and good practices amongst governmental, inter-governmental and non-governmental actors. Marcus is a civil engineer by training and has a master’s degree in project management.