

# **The World Ministerial Conference on Disaster Reduction in Tohoku**

## **~Joint Endeavors for Solutions: Wisdom of the World to the Disaster-Affected Areas, Lessons of the Disaster-Affected Areas to the World~**

Tohoku, July 3rd and 4th, 2012

### **Chair's Summary**

"The World Ministerial Conference on Disaster Reduction in Tohoku" was held on July 3rd and 4th in Sendai City, Ichinoseki City, Ishinomaki City and Fukushima City. Representatives from the Governments of 63 countries, including the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and other relevant Ministers, and 14 international organizations, as well as representatives from local governments, the private sector and civil societies participated in the Conference. The Conference was chaired by Mr. Koichiro Gemba, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan. Mr. Yoshihiko Noda, Prime Minister of Japan and Miss Helen Clark, UNDP Administrator gave the opening remarks. The Conference marked a significant opportunity to make comprehensive discussions on the need to build resilient societies to disasters, the critical importance of realizing human security as a basis of such resilient societies, the long-term economic efficiency of investment in disaster reduction, the importance of disaster preparedness and sustainable recovery, and the call for mainstreaming disaster reduction at every level of public services and international efforts for that end. The Conference gave impetus to ongoing discussions on a successor framework of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 to be adopted at the third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction.

### **Towards Building Resilient Societies**

The participants highlighted the urgent need to build "resilient societies." Resilient societies are prepared to manage natural disasters from every aspect, including prevention, mitigation, emergency response, recovery and reconstruction. Resilient societies are well-prepared so that damages could be minimized. If natural hazards occur, they can effectively take measures for emergency response, recovery and reconstruction.

The Participants stressed the importance of paying due considerations to vulnerable individuals such as the poor, the elderly, the sick and wounded, children, persons with disabilities and pregnant women in disaster reduction efforts. They further underscored that building resilient communities require proper recognition of women's roles in disaster reduction and the empowerment of individuals through such means as disaster education. They confirmed that human security is a key foundation of disaster reduction efforts.

The participants concluded that investment in disaster reduction pays. They also found that strengthening the capacity of developing countries and increasing the availability of funds for disaster reduction and recovery are in the interest of the

international community as well, since large-scale natural disasters affect not only countries directly hit but the wider international community in various ways, not least through damages in production and commerce.

## **Towards Mainstreaming Disaster Reduction**

The participants underscored the need to mainstream disaster reduction at every level of public policy by prioritizing it, ensuring adequate governance mechanisms for disaster reduction and allocating sufficient financial resources to it. While recognizing the central responsibility of governments and the importance of ensuring the national ownership of disaster reduction, they also affirmed important roles borne by regional and international organizations, especially in disaster-prone regions and developing countries.

Particularly, the participants shared the views on the importance of strengthening regional cooperation on disaster reduction such as establishing early warning system and conducting joint disaster needs assessment, recovery planning and trainings as practiced in the Asia-Pacific region.

The participants affirmed the need to strengthen international assistance and resources for emergency response, recovery and reconstruction in supporting government-led efforts in post-disaster situations. Support for developing countries needs to be stepped up in order to strengthen their response capacity such as providing early warnings and assistance for the evacuees, and their capacity for initiating recovery as early as possible and facilitate a smooth transition based on a sound assessment. They further shared the views that disaster reduction should be incorporated as a major element in a post-2015 international development framework (post-Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)).

## **Actions to Minimize Damages from Natural Catastrophes (Mainstreaming Disaster Reduction at the National and Regional Levels)**

### **(1) Towards Building Resilient Societies Well-Prepared for Catastrophes**

The participants affirmed the importance of estimating damages of possible natural hazards and their impacts to societies as accurately as possible and sharing such information among relevant stakeholders. They concluded it is necessary to make damage estimation and risk analysis by anticipating the largest possible natural catastrophes. They also considered it critical to maximize disaster reduction capability by appropriately combining structural ("hard") and non-structural ("soft") measures, in accordance with particular national or regional needs.

The participants recognized, for countries where basic infrastructure is increasingly being established, the value of promoting and taking multi-layered measures (redundancy) for critical infrastructure, including transportation and communication networks as next steps.

The participants stressed the need to promote a meaningful and effective educational programmes for disaster reduction which leads to concrete actions when natural

catastrophes occur. They called for sharing experience and lessons learned from the past disasters as "international public goods", especially to developing countries which may not have sufficient experience in disaster education. The participants affirmed the importance for individuals to understand clearly both merits and limitations of specific disaster reduction measures so that they do what they must do if a large-scale natural hazard occurs.

## **(2) Towards Building Resilient Societies When Disasters Occur**

The participants recognized that increasing awareness on "self-help", through such means as disaster education, enables people to protect their own lives and safety when natural hazards occur.

The participants underlined the central roles played by local communities in creating an enabling environment for disaster reduction through effective collaboration by various stakeholders. These roles include assisting the socially vulnerable, providing psychological care to disaster victims, and forging consensus for land use planning and regulations. They also confirmed, with regard to planning for disaster reduction or reconstruction, the importance of hearing various opinions of the society, including local residents and communities, businesses, non-profit organizations (NPOs), volunteer workers, women and the socially vulnerable.

The participants acknowledged that disaster reduction and recovery are public goods and that participation as well as responsibility for disaster reduction must be shared by general citizens, local governments and communities, private sector, civil society and other sectors of the society. The participants affirmed the critical importance of operational coordination during the disaster through broad partnership among various stakeholders transcending sectoral differences. Such a partnership includes: assistance to local governments whose administrative functions are damaged due to disasters by other local governments; strong coordination links between local and national governments; support by the businesses community supplementing the public sector; coordination among non-governmental organizations (NGOs); coordination between the government and NGOs; cooperation between governments and media in disseminating and collecting information in disasters as well as in following up on recovery processes. They also pointed out the importance of building frameworks for a swift and smooth acceptance of international assistance.

The participants stressed the importance of setting up institutional arrangements in advance which allow effective emergency responses immediately after large-scale disasters and timely early recovery. They confirmed that the international community should help disaster-stricken countries accurately grasp the post-disaster needs and promptly engage in response and recovery efforts. The participants recognized the needs to address root causes of the disaster in the reconstruction process so as not to reproduce the vulnerabilities.

## **(3) Towards Building Resilient Societies Addressing Emerging Disaster Risks**

The participants stressed the need to appropriately respond to newly emerging disaster risks that in recent years have significantly raise the cost of disasters, for example the concentration of advanced industries in disaster-prone areas, urbanization, and climate change.

The participants confirmed that the international community should cooperate in promoting adaptation to climate change and in building resilient cities. They found measures to respond to urbanization should be comprehensive, including urban planning based on disaster risk assessment, disaster reduction planning, construction of disaster-resilient infrastructure, establishment of quake-resistance standards, and promotion of disaster education.

Resilient economics are crucial elements for resilient societies. The participants affirmed that the business community should acquire acute sense of the importance of establishing effective business continuity plans (BCPs) for individual companies and production/commerce networks as part of their preparedness, considering possible wide-spread consequences of natural disasters to their globalized economic activities.

The participants shared the views that, in today's highly complex societies, it is likely that natural hazards pose threats in which multiple risks simultaneously manifest themselves and that prioritization should be made in the planning of preparedness in order to effectively allocate limited human and financial resources for responding to such threats.

## **Towards a New International Framework for Disaster Reduction (Mainstreaming Disaster Reduction at the International Level)**

The participants underscored that the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 has served as a useful guideline for the international community in the field of disaster reduction. They further affirmed the need to establish an effective post-HFA that incorporates major findings of this Conference and can respond to emerging challenges and increasing vulnerabilities, in order to mainstream disaster reduction in development.

The participants recognized the need to promote concrete actions for disaster reduction in countries and regions across the globe by clarifying, in the new framework for action, what should be done "by when", "to what extent" and "how" in the face of increasing disaster risks. For that end, they confirmed the need to consider concrete goals and targets, evaluation measures, and synthetic integration of relevant measures.

The participants affirmed the importance of disaster reduction measures such as early warning. They at the same time stressed the need to make comprehensive efforts for post-disaster management including emergency response, recovery and reconstruction based on the recognition that natural catastrophes are unavoidable, despite serious prevention and mitigation efforts.

The participants pointed out that cooperation of international organizations with abundant experience is essential to consolidate the mainstreaming of disaster reduction. They shared the views that further active involvement of organizations which have both mandates and resources is crucial in every stage of disaster reduction from prevention, emergency response, recovery to reconstruction.

The participants stressed that the outcome of this Conference should support the preparation for the Global Platform in 2013 in Geneva and the third UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2015, anticipating that the findings of this

Conference, together with the other important occasions for consultations, will form crucial building blocks in the discussions of a post-HFA. In this regard, the participants welcomed the intention expressed by the Government of Japan to host the third UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction.

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