

# REPORT OF THE PANEL DISCUSSION ON DISASTER RISK REDUCTION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

3 April 2012, Kampala, Uganda

## 1.0 Preamble

The Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction jointly hosted a panel discussion on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Sustainable Development, under the overall 126<sup>th</sup> IPU Assembly theme of '**Parliaments and People: Bridging the Gap**'.

The meeting aimed to offer an opportunity to share views and experiences on the linkages among disasters, development and risk reduction, and to learn about the Model Act for the facilitation and regulation of international disaster relief, as well as the global campaign on resilient cities. The meeting was well attended, by 74 MPs representing 23 delegations.

The presentations, as well as the interactive session thereafter, were rich and diverse, practical and concise, reflecting on concepts on disaster risk reduction and sustainable development, as well as experiences and good practices in Africa, Asia and Central America.

Per UNISDR estimates, over the past 12 years the economic and human impact of disasters has been a staggering \$1.3 trillion in damage, 2.7 billion have been affected and 1.1 million have been killed. The 2011 Global Assessment Report clearly establishes that the economic loss risk continues to increase across all regions and seriously threatens low-income countries.

Climate change, fast urbanization and population pressure -- in addition to unsustainable development practices *of the past* -- increase vulnerabilities and accentuate disaster risks. The 2011 Global Assessment Report clearly establishes that losses on account of weather-related disasters in OECD countries are now higher than the rate at which the wealth itself is being created. Clearly, the mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction into development policies, planning and programmes is a key to achieving sustainable development. Hence, disaster risk resilience, as one of the pillars of sustainable development, is imperative to protect past investments and socio-economic advances, as well as to facilitate accelerated growth and development in the future.

It is recognized that parliamentarians have an important leadership role in promoting and championing DRR by engaging in this agenda and ensuring sustainable development, peace and security. Similarly, governments need to account for historical losses incurred on account of disasters, and thereafter carry out cost-benefit analyses on investing in risk resilience. Given that resources are finite and needs and demands are not, expenditure and investment by Governments have to be smart and result in optimal impact and benefits that are sustainable.

A culture of prevention has to be promoted at all levels. The need of the hour is to be proactive and focus on preparedness and resilience prior to hazards, rather than focus on reactive response with relief and rehabilitation after hazards have turned to disasters. This becomes all the more critical given that IPCC are now projecting more extreme events and that too with increasing frequency.

## **2.0 Key messages delivered by the panellists**

The panellists brought to fore the fact of the documented rise in number and intensity of disasters including earthquakes, floods, Tsunami, cyclones and droughts. Disasters, the panellists noted, had led to losses of hundreds of thousands of lives and further increased the vulnerability of communities.

In some cases, flawed development in the past was termed a vicious cycle, increasing exposure and vulnerability to natural hazards, contributing to increased occurrence of disasters, and to growing losses that can wipe out social economic gains in a matter of seconds or hours. In addition, some of the funds available for social-economic development have to then be spent for disaster response. This has a lot to do with poor planning, inability to translate policies into national action plans and to lack of recognition of the importance of disaster risk reduction. On the other hand, mainstreaming risk assessment and risk management into all socio-economic planning and programmes protects socio-economic gains.

In Bangladesh, a staggering USD 5.9 billion, amounting to about 3% of the GDP, was lost over a nine year period (1991-2000) due to disasters, with a half a million lives lost. Lately however, the inculcation of early warning systems and the building of cyclone shelters within an overall framework of Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme (CDMP) have saved the vast majority of lives during disasters, reducing deaths and displacement by an impressive 99%. The focus is now on livelihoods to ensure that lives saved have a minimum quality.

Japan has borne the brunt of a great many disasters since the 1960s, especially that caused by the 1995 earthquake in Kobe and by the devastating Great East Japan Earthquake followed by a Tsunami in 2011. Japan has been improving its legislations and policies and strengthening risk reduction and disaster response systems after each disaster, based on the lessons learned. The country's solid effort and investment in disaster response and risk reduction is a key to limiting disaster damage. Disaster risk reduction awareness is especially important, as is the putting of disaster prevention knowledge into action.

In East Africa, a reported 20 million people suffered the harsh consequences of drought in 2009. Two years later, another 10 million were affected by the worst drought in East Africa and the Greater Horn of Africa region in over six decades. Disasters, it was emphasized, were not "Acts of God" but rather issues central to developing planning and the priorities of governments, parliaments and related stakeholders.

In Panama, the continued absence of growth control measures puts the country in a position of vulnerability to disasters caused by natural hazards. To reduce vulnerabilities to disaster, the country has made some progress in the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action. Panama has updated institutional guidelines, standards and policies, with the mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction in development plans, and with the development of good risk reduction and sustainable use of natural resources practices in private companies and public institutions alike.

Parliamentarians on their part can enhance their knowledge on disaster risk reduction issues. There is a particular need to re-connect intellectual thinking with policy making, by enhancing relations between scientists and politicians. A case in point was the drought in East Africa which was predicted by scientists but with little response from parliamentarians and other stakeholders until it happened.

Legal preparedness was deemed vital during times of disasters for effective relief response, including removing regulatory barriers and balancing between legal issues and the reality on the ground at entry points (borders and ports). With such challenges, it is important to explore together a possible general treaty on disasters.

### **3.0 Plenary Discussions**

Parliamentarians agreed that education and sensitization messages were a key to building a culture of prevention, and that capacity building of parliaments is also important. The need to arrest and reverse the trend between the rates of marginal wealth creation and the rate of losses on account of disasters was also emphasized.

Parliamentarians underscored the need for sharing of information and best practices in order to spur legislation. The Philippines legislation on disaster risk reduction was termed a 'progressive act' and a 'milestone' that should encourage uptake of legislation globally. On this score, the East African Legislative Assembly is expected to pass a similar law before the end of the year.

The mandate of a parliament lies in legislation, oversight and representation. It is important for legislators to reverse the growing trend towards greater disaster risks, and greater disaster impacts, by exercising their roles and responsibilities given by the people that they represent.

### **4.0 Recommendations and the way forward**

Parliaments and regional assemblies facilitate linkages between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation through relevant legislation and policy convergence in regional and national action plans. Relevant legislation should be a priority on parliamentary agendas. The *Philippines Act* and the *Model Act on International Disaster Relief Law* are good entry points.

Members of parliaments appreciated the engagement of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in the subject matter and requests IPU to prioritize disaster risk reduction in its agenda and also in context of its growing and evolving strategic relationship with the UN.

The five points below echo the way forward for parliamentarians in taking their leadership role to promote risk reduction and resilience building towards sustainable development at all levels.

1. Take active participation in the consultation process towards the coming UN *Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio + 20)*, the coming *Post-2015 Development Framework* and *Post-2015 Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction*.
2. Urge governments to forge coherent approaches to climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction by using the *Hyogo Framework for Action (2005-2015)*.

3. Champion the course to scale up the use of risk reduction tools as a core policy element for climate change adaptation, the *Millennium Development Goals*, and sustainable development.
4. Emphasize disaster risk reduction as a central issue in all development sector policies and programmes.
5. Support the *World Disaster Reduction Campaign on Making Cities Resilient* by knowing more about disaster risk reduction, investing wisely by integrating it in development planning, and by building more safely through participatory urban development planning and critical infrastructure.

## **ANNEX 1**

### **List of the Panellists**

1. Moderator: Hon (Mr.) Alex Byarugaba, Chairperson of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Disaster Risk Reduction Forum of Uganda.
2. Rt. Hon Abdirahin Abdi (Mr), Speaker of the East African Legislative Assembly.
3. Hon (Mr) Saber Chowdhury, Member of Parliament of Bangladesh and President of the First Standing Committee on Peace and International Security.
4. Hon (Mr) Yoshitaka Murata, Member of the House of Representatives of Japan and former Minister of State Disaster Management in Japan.
5. Rt. Hon (Mr) Rony Arauz, Deputy Speaker, National Assembly of Panama.
6. Dr (Ms) Feng Min Kan, Special Advisor to UN Assistant to UN Secretary General for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR).
7. Ms. Sanne Boswijk, Disaster Law Delegate for Africa, International Federation of the Red Cross.
8. Rapporteur: Mr. Bobi Odiko, Senior Public Relations Officer, East African Legislative Assembly, Arusha, Tanzania.