



Opening Statements

Tuesday, 16th June 2009

The 2nd Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction commenced on Tuesday, 16th June 2009 with a keynote address by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, and was followed by a Welcome Address by Mr. Hans-Rudolf Merz, President of the Swiss Confederation. Opening statements were provided by the United Nations Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Chair of the Second Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, Heads of State and High-Level personalities.

The UN Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, addressed the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction by video message. Recognizing that the world is increasingly facing threats from natural disasters – with the impacts of climate change compounding the situation – he stressed that DRR is the frontline defence and a crucial investment for the future. He challenged participants to set targets and take practical steps to reduce the loss of life and damage from disasters.

Mr. Hans-Rudolf Merz, President of the Swiss Confederation, described Switzerland's commitment to invest prevention measures against such local natural hazards as land slides, floods, drought and earthquakes. He said that it is better to "prevent than to cure", and stressed the importance of cooperation and experience sharing for global solutions and more effective protection measures against natural disasters.

Mr. John Holmes, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Chair of the Second Session of the Global Platform, welcomed participants to the Global Platform, underlined overarching themes of the meeting: the linkages between disasters, poverty and vulnerability, as well as the connection between DRR and climate change. He then highlighted progress in four key areas: increased DRR investment; integration of DRR into climate change adaptation and development policies; acceleration of community resilience and livelihood protection; and a comprehensive mid-term review of the HFA. He stressed that, although the international community is increasingly addressing DRR and has placed it on the agenda of the UN climate change negotiations, there is still a need to integrate it into core decision-making processes of governments to ensure sustained action.

Mr. Anote Tong, President of Kiribati, alerted participants to the existing security threats that climate change poses to his nation and other Pacific island countries. He outlined the importance of short-term adaptation strategies to address the impacts of climate change, but underscored the need to eventually relocate the population of his country within the next 50 years. Mr. Tong stressed the need for robust global policy frameworks, financial investments and effective partnerships for strengthening the resilience of Small Island Development States, and extended gratitude to the EU and multilateral institutions for sustained funding of adaptation programmes in Kiribati.

Mr. Rafael Albuquerque, Vice-President of the Dominican Republic, outlined national challenges and policies to address natural disasters in his country, including the development of a national platform on DRR, the establishment of a technical committee, and efforts to establish a national fund for disaster risk prevention and reduction. Noting that natural disaster impacts are both causes and consequences of poverty, he discussed the connection between poverty and adaptation. Stressing the need for participatory approaches to DRR, he described civil society initiatives such as "work brigades" and a solidarity programme in his country.

Mr. Orette Bruce Golding, Prime Minister of Jamaica, said UNISDR's mission is crucial to the well-being of the world but noted that many governments display insufficient political commitment to action. Noting that natural disasters in 2008 affected 200 million people and incurred damage costs of US\$180 billion, he stressed the importance of financial resources for risk reduction and observed that the contributions to the United Nations Trust Fund for Disaster Risk Reduction are not substantial enough.

Mr. Raila Odinga, Prime Minister of Kenya, drew attention to the effects of climate change facing Africa as well as other pressing priorities on the continent and called for an inter sectoral approach to deal with DRR and climate change at national, regional and global levels. He also reported on the Initiative of African Parliamentarians "Black and Ready to Go Green"— a concerted effort to save Africa from disasters and the impacts of climate change.

Ms Issatou Njie Saidy, Vice President of Gambia, stressed the need for better stakeholder coordination for DRR and stronger strategic alliances and partnerships to address resource and financial challenges faced by developing countries. She also mentioned that disasters exacerbate existing inequalities such as poverty and gender discrimination. Any efforts to reduce disaster risks therefore have to be made sensitive to the needs of the poor as well as vulnerable women.

Mr. Libertina Amathila, Deputy Prime Minister of Namibia, urged participants to use this forum to share experiences, expertise and practices in order to "make a difference for the people on the ground." Drawing on his country's experiences in managing natural disasters, Mr. Muhammad Abdur Razzaque, Minister of Food and Disaster Management of Bangladesh, stressed the need for greater investment in early warning systems (EWS) that would better prepare nations for disasters. Mr. Liew Vui Keong, Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, emphasized the importance of public-private partnerships in addressing DRR and the role of the media in raising public awareness.

Philippine's Senator and UNISDR Regional Champion for Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation for Asia and Pacific, Ms. Loren Legarda, described disaster risk reduction as a moral imperative and social responsibility calling for a new vision and approach to development. Describing natural disasters as the "greatest humanitarian challenge of our time," she called for a renewed commitment to DRR and urgent policy reforms that, inter alia, build local capacities, link DRR and climate change adaptation, and acknowledge indigenous knowledge and gender sensitivity.

The statements delivered during the opening session identified a number of common issues, concerns and recommendations. In summary, speakers agreed that disaster risks they have long been exposed to have drastically increased. Existing capacities that have developed over time to cope with recurring disasters are increasingly challenged by new threats, such as climate change, disease and conflict. Many speakers reported considerable advances and progress in developing national DRR policies and institutional mechanisms. Also regional efforts towards strengthening disaster risk management and climate change adaptation spearheaded by ASEAN, the Summit of Heads of States of Africa, SOPAC, the United Nations and many more, have yielded considerable achievements. These, however, are still not considered sufficient and need further strengthening and additional resources. Many speakers also recognized that disaster risk and climate change have both, common causes and common solutions and stressed that the new global agreement on climate change acknowledges the importance of disaster risk reduction and the Hyogo Framework for Action.

Following the opening statements, the plenary adopted the draft agenda.