



International Strategy for Disaster Reduction

Can We Provide A Safer World for Our Children?

*The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015:
Building the Resilience of Nations and
Communities to Disasters*

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Mission

The ISDR aims at building disaster resilient communities by promoting increased awareness of the importance of disaster reduction as an integral component of sustainable development, with the goal of reducing human, social, economic and environmental losses due to natural hazards and related technological and environmental disasters.

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Dear colleagues and friends, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to address this valuable Symposium. It is an important occasion to remind us of the need to ensure a Safer World in the Twenty First century.

I wish to thank the Munich Re Foundation for having invited the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction to be part of the Symposium.

The recent South Asia Earthquake, the tsunami and other disasters are a wake-up call to what should have been realised long ago. Disasters are undermining the world's development as never before. The current widespread disregard for disaster risks, hazards and their impacts presents an extraordinary challenge to communities and nations in their efforts to move closer to the Millennium Development Goals¹. Now is the time to realise that we are far from powerless: communities and nations can build the resilience to disasters by investing in proactive measures to reduce risk and vulnerability. Disaster risk reduction is essential to meet global challenges including sustainable development and the eradication of poverty.

We have come to understand that disasters are caused mainly by the vulnerability of society. During this period, education, science and technology have allowed for a better understanding of why and how disasters occur, and have identified the means and methods to reduce disaster impact.

Nevertheless, although scientific and technical knowledge has advanced enormously, vulnerability on the other hand, in particular in the developing world, continues to increase rapidly with populations settling more and more in urban risk areas, with ecosystems being rapidly degraded and with global warming threatening impacts of unbearable magnitude.

In January of this year, at Kobe, Hyogo, Japan, a large gathering of Governments and international organizations addressed the main causes of disasters with a view to reduce risk and vulnerability to natural hazards in the next ten years. The Second World Conference on Disaster Reduction was held only 3 weeks after the terrible tsunami struck the Indian Ocean nations.

¹ While recent commitments were made at the 2005 World Summit, by all nations reaffirming their support to assist countries to achieve the MDGs, recent disaster impacts in many countries have revealed a woeful neglect of efforts to make the MDGs disaster resilient. Although development aid to scale up the efforts to achieve the MDGs is valuable, it is of utmost importance that this development cooperation explicitly incorporates risk reduction measures. For example, in pursuit of the MDG of universal primary literacy by 2015, building schools is important. However, the earthquake in Pakistan led to loss of large number of children because the school building collapsed, as they did not conform to seismic building codes, even though the regional was known to be a seismic zone. Similarly, the 2004 floods in Bangladesh and 2005 floods in India again revealed that efforts at having global poverty by 2015, another MDG, will be wiped away by disaster impacts, unless poverty reduction strategies and over all development planning efforts include diversified livelihoods strategies which insulate the livelihoods of the poorest against hazard risks. The UN/ISDR, UN Millennium Office, UNDP and the World Bank, along with the ProVention Consortium, are joining efforts to ensure that such measures are integrated in the planning efforts for poverty reduction of countries at high disaster risk.

Under the name of “*Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters*”, some 168 Governments agreed on a set of goals and priority actions to address this urgent challenge of our times and launched an historic efforts to change the priorities for the international community.

The 26 December 2004 tsunami disaster and the World Conference contributed enormously to raising the level of political awareness of the importance of disaster risk reduction to a higher level than ever before.

We know from experience that in the months following large catastrophic events, strong calls are made to shift our collective approach to dealing with natural hazards and to focus on reducing risk and vulnerability. Too often, after a few weeks or months, the attention level drops and the same mistakes are made again.

However, in the case of the tsunami, this window of opportunity coincided with the World Conference (WCDR), which allowed for an increased commitment to address risk reduction as an essential condition for sustainable development.

Its main outcome, the Hyogo Framework, provides a ten-year plan of action, with concrete suggestion to maintain commitments and attention, including strengthening institutional capacities and monitoring progress towards self-identified benchmarks and targets.

Shifting the focus and the resources to disaster risk reduction

Reducing disaster risk cannot remain a technical and academic issue. It needs to become part of our everyday life and behaviour. It has long been recognized that the necessary legislation and building codes exist and the level of scientific knowledge on how to build hazard resistant buildings is available, although not sufficiently applied.

In order to ensure that every building and every new land-use plan takes the risk to natural hazards into consideration, we need to ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation. In addition, we need effective risk assessments and maps, which are multi-hazard, and we need to reduce the underlying risk factors, through the protection of critical facilities.

I would like to stress however that these will only become a reality if we are able to (1) systematically demonstrate the cost benefit of engaging in disaster risk reduction; (2) decentralize decision making processes and resources to the level where relevant planning and development plans are being implemented – often these decision are taken by local authorities; and finally (3) educate, educate and educate, through formal, non-formal and informal means (school curricula, research, public awareness and the media) – in order to build a culture of safety and resilience.

Unfortunately, although the awareness of the need and ability to reduce risk has increased, more resources continue to be dedicated to respond to the disasters, rather than to address the underlying causes to reduce disasters.

Implementing the Hyogo Framework

We need, therefore, to use and promote the Hyogo Framework as a tool not only to provide direction, but also to maintain a strong focus on disaster risk reduction.

Among other, the Hyogo Framework (paragraph 19, ii, 1) promotes the establishment of public-private partnerships to better engage the private sector in disaster risk reduction activities; it also encourages the private sector to foster a culture of disaster prevention, putting greater emphasis on, and allocating resources to, pre-disaster activities such as risk assessments and early warning systems.

Munich Reinsurance, with its 125 years experience, has been pioneering in this field for a long time and is widely recognized not only as a very effective and productive company but also as one of the main sources of information on the subject. Its recently created Foundation is now widening its outreach to address the challenges of our times and support work on education and training, science and research, disaster prevention, environmental protection, and public healthcare.

I therefore conclude by encouraging the Munich Re Foundation to continue its good work and to contribute to this global movement towards the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action and to use the Hyogo Framework in your work to address the underlying causes of disasters. I look forward to your continued collaboration with the efforts of the United Nations through its International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. The ISDR secretariat remains available and committed to work with you in addressing this global challenge.

Thank you for your attention.

Munich, 16 November 2005