

Opening speech

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The Fifth ADRC International Meeting

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, Colleagues,

It is a great pleasure to be here and taking part in the opening ceremony of the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2003.

First of all I would like to express the gratitude to the Asian Disaster Reduction Centre for their efforts in initiating and preparing for this event. I am also very pleased to play a role in this conference and having the opportunity to meet so many important regional stakeholders so soon upon my arrival.

I have just been appointed as the Regional Disaster Response Advisor for Asia, based here in Kobe, replacing the former Advisor, Ms. Feng Min Kan. It is my intention to build upon the good work initiated by her during the past three years. It is my good fortune that Ms Feng Min Kahn is also present in the conference, now in the capacity as the Regional Advisor for the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction in Africa.

I am delighted by the possibility to so immediately upon arrival having the opportunity to learn from the experience you all will bring into this conference. I will also emphasize on the possibilities and importance to use this conference as an opportunity to build network between experts in your different capacities, belonging to various National entities in the region, UN family or NGOs.

I have been working with development and disaster response work for more than 25 years. I have been a member of UNDAC since the start. My educational background is in public administration and management and I have working experience from Government, NGOs and Private sector. My field experience has brought me to many places, however Asia has always been close to me and I feel both humble and proud for the challenge given to me as the Regional Disaster Response Advisor.

The Asian Disaster Response Unit of OCHA Kobe was established in early 2000 with support of the Japanese Government. Since then, we have been closely working with ADRC in information sharing, advocacy of the Total Disaster Risk Management approach, and organization of the workshops.

Our main tasks are to provide assistance in disaster response, response preparedness and promotion of cooperation and partnership in the region.

For effective disaster response, our office provide support to UN Resident Coordinators, UNDMTs, UN agencies, Governments and organizations in on-site damage and needs assessment, preparation of disaster situation reports, information collection and dissemination and mobilizations and coordination of international relief assistance.

In the last three years, our office has carried out more than 30 missions related to disaster response, disaster response preparedness, international cooperation in disaster response

and capacity building. Our office also led two UNDAC missions and supported one UNDAC and one UNDMT mission, resulting in three inter-agency appeals for emergency relief and initial rehabilitation and two disaster assessment reports. We also advised the UN Resident Coordinators on usages of OCHA emergency grants, and issues related to tracking, monitoring and evaluating relief assistance.

For disaster response preparedness, our office provides technical advice on disaster response and preparedness, promote cooperation in natural disaster response and response preparedness, organize or participate in training or workshops on natural disasters in Asia. We have also promoted multi-level efforts in disaster response preparedness, notably through projects funded by the ASEAN Foundation and the USAID/OFDA. For example, we organized two workshops in Kobe and one in Bangkok last year in cooperation with ADRC. The first workshop held in February in Kobe aimed to enhance the regional cooperation among NGOs, the objective of the second one held in August was to provide a good understanding on the Total Disaster Risk Management Approach and discuss the way of implementation.

In addition, the second consultative meeting was co-organized with ADRC and ADPC in Bangkok to provide a forum to consolidate collaboration and coordination among regional institutions and regional offices of UN agencies and international organizations in disaster management. Through those activities, I believe that the activities of our office have been widely known by governments, NGOs and regional organizations in the region. Thus, we have been trying to strengthen our cooperation and partnership with all the stakeholders in Asia.

In 2001, a sub-office of the Relief Web project was integrated into the UN-OCHA Kobe office. The Relief web has during the last few years improved its services, and have become the worlds premier electronic clearinghouse for those needing timely information on humanitarian emergencies and natural disasters. The site recives now 1 million hits per week.

Needless to say, we have been aware of the importance of disaster reduction as well as disaster response. The recent disasters in Asia have caused severe suffering of millions of people and billions of dollards of economic loss. Not only are the frequency and intensity of disasters growing, but society is becoming more vulnerable due to its unsafe conditions, poor physical environment and fragile local economy. Even if complex emergencies create immense human suffering, nature in rage is an even greater challenge for man.

In February, torrential rains caused severe floods in Indonesia, killing more than 150 people. In June, heavy rainfalls caused flash floods and landslides in central and south China. These were followed by more floods due to a typhoon and heavy rainfalls in August, and affected 57 million people, and it's related direct economic loss was officially reported around 2.2 billion dollars. In September, the Republic of Korea was hit by the most powerful typhoon since 1959. South-East Asian countries, notably Cambodia, Thailand and Viet Nam, have also suffered from severe floods this summer, which have already claimed more than 280 lives. Cambodia has also been affected by a severe drought, reportedly the worst in the last two decades.

In order to minimize impact and damage caused by disaters, more effective reduction strategies for hazard mapping, vulnerability assessment, community participation, information management, etc are required. I hope that this conference will provide an

opportunity to each country to consider what needs to be done to reduce impact and damage by disasters. Then, I hope that our office can cooperate to implement these strategies with ADRC, Governments, NGOs and regional organizations.

Thank you for your kind attention