

Opening Remarks for Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2003

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Dear Governor,
Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to address a few words at the opening of the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2003.

Asian is one of the most disaster-prone regions in the world and has suffered from numerous disasters that account for 40 % of the total number of natural disaster occurrence and 90 % of the total affected people in the world. Last year many Asian countries were hit by large-scale natural disasters, such as flood and sediment disasters.

Japan, which is located in the far east of Asia, ranks among the countries that are frequently struck by disasters, for example, earthquakes, tsunami, volcano eruptions, typhoons and heavy snowfall. As well, Kobe, where we are gathered today, was hit by a devastating earthquake on January 17th 8 years ago and I myself experienced the disaster at home. This major earthquake deprived of more than 6,400 people's lives.

When it comes to disaster management, people often think about post-disaster actions. However, we must also concentrate on disaster reduction and preparedness. As in the event of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, many people were killed by the rubble of collapsed houses. If the houses had been more resistant to earthquake, there would have been much fewer victims triggered by the earthquake. As Mr. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations has emphasized, "Prevention is better than cure."

Economic growth in Asian countries has been remarkable and for it to be further enhanced, disaster reduction is crucial. Disasters and poverty tend to get caught in a vicious cycle and we need to break it for the development of the region.

To reduce disaster-related losses, it is important for Asian countries to collaborate with

international organizations in each country and to develop and establish an international cooperative framework.

Many Asian countries have experienced various natural disasters, such as earthquakes and typhoons, and accumulated various lessons and expertise in disasters with a sacrifice of many people's lives.

It is important to share these valuable lessons at this meeting and learn with each other from the experiences so that we can promote effective disaster reduction measures in Asia. We, as people who live in the country that experienced the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, would be more than happy to contribute to strengthen disaster reduction capabilities in Asian region.

In 1994, an international conference in the field of disaster reduction was organized by the United Nations for the first time in Yokohama and the "Yokohama Strategy" with a Plan of Action was devised to guide cooperation in disaster reduction. The United Nations has initiated the process for the formulation of a new international strategy for disaster reduction in the 21st Century. Japan appreciates this initiative and would like to positively contribute toward this process.

Today, it is our pleasure to have many experts such as policy makers and academics in the field of disaster reduction from not only Asian region but also other parts the world. We would sincerely hope that the discussion at this conference brings forth fruitful results to reinforce disaster reduction capabilities in Asian region

Last but not least, I wish all of you continued good health and great success in your career.