

*Inaugural Session for the workshop on "DRR in the Pacific Islands"
by Mr.Koji Suzuki, Executive Director of ADRC*

Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning.

I am feeling much honored to co-organize the workshop on the "Disaster Risk Reduction in the Pacific Islands" with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Government of Japan, here at Kobe, with the cooperation of JICA.

The Asian Disaster Reduction Center has been established in 1998 in Kobe after the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake, ADRC has been received the part of financial and technical support from the 27 member countries in Asia. From the Pacific Islands, the government of Papua New Guinea (PNG) is the original member of ADRC from our establishment. ADRC has been committed itself in enhancing the capacity of disaster risk reduction of the countries in Asia.

As for the Pacific Islands, in 1998, an earthquake measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale occurred, with the epicenter only 30 kilometers from the coast of north-west Papua New Guinea, the Aitape tsunami struck the west coast in Sandaun Province causing the death of 2,022 people and destroying entire villages and leaving thousands homeless.

After the Aitape Tsunami, ADRC have had a project with Government of PNG on the enhancement of the community risk awareness to the tsunami. The Disaster Management Department of PNG and ADRC developed and conducted the risk awareness program with the cooperation of PNG University. On the other hand, in 2000, an earthquake measuring eight on the Richter scale occurred off the Papua New Guinea coast. While it created a tsunami that destroyed thousands of houses, fortunately there were no human losses. The risk awareness program we provided was so effective to enhance the community risk awareness to the tsunami.

Before preparing for the workshop, we collected the past natural disaster events to identify the natural disaster risk in the Pacific Islands. Since some countries are sitting on the so called "Ring of Fire", and also sitting on the area of the typhoon generating and growing, most of the countries are prone to volcanic eruption, earthquake, tsunami and typhoon. And since some islands are facing the problem of the raising the sea level due to global warming, they are more vulnerable to the flood and surge risk than ever.

On the other hand, if the natural disaster happens anywhere in the Pacific Islands, it is difficult to conduct the immediate rescue and relief activity with the difficulty of the easy

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access to the affected site from the central government due to the nature of the Island country. The community has to be the first responder to the natural disaster and it is very important to strengthen the community's capacity on the disaster risk reduction. In order to make the community more resilient to disaster, the community based disaster risk reduction including raising public awareness is very effective. To make the community more resilient to disasters, public support by the government alone is not enough. Individual involvement in disaster risk reduction and mutual help in the community are also critical for that.

As you know, Japan is also highly natural disaster prone country as well as the Pacific Islands. So, through the workshop, we, ADRC are confident that it will be beneficial for you to learn our disaster risk reduction knowledge based on the past Japanese experiences as well as the experiences from our member countries to mitigate your future natural disaster losses. In particular, since the community disaster risk reduction activity as I mentioned above is the one of our main activities since our establishment, we would inform you of our good practice and experience for your reference through the workshop.

And, the 5th Pacific Island Countries Summit will be held in Japan in 2009, we hope to discuss the possibility of the future collaboration and regional cooperation on the disaster risk reduction as a one of themes of the Summit.

Finally, we hope that the participants will mutually recognize and share the useful information on DRR within the region through the workshop.

Thank you very much for your attention.