

## **Opening Speech**

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Distinguished guest, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honor for me, on behalf of the Mr. Jan Egeland, the Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Emergency Coordinator, as well as on behalf of the organizers of this conference, the Asian Disaster Reduction Center and OCHA Kobe Office, to welcome you all to this international workshop on Total Disaster Risk Management. I am pleased to have the opportunity to welcome Government officials involved in disaster work from 22 nations, representatives from 10 Non Governmental Organizations involved in disaster preparedness and response work in Asia and recourse persons representing a wide range of knowledge and experiences in disaster management field in Asia.

Asia is the most disaster-prone region in the world. This year only, landslides, storms, earthquakes, cyclones, and floods in Indonesia, Pakistan, India, China, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka took hundred of human lives and billions of dollars of economic losses. Korea has been hit by the strongest typhoon in decades. The natural disasters occurred in recent years were more severe, prolonged and widespread in the region. The extensive disasters impoverished millions of people, caused widespread human hardship, and have become the key obstacle against sustainable development in many countries.

The increasing numbers of natural disasters and vulnerability of the affected populations is a global problem. As national economies and infrastructures become more closely linked, climatic shocks of all sizes have widespread impact.

Recent findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), provide an alarming picture for the future. Temperatures are increasing globally. If there is indeed a link between climate change and a rise in weather-related disasters, natural disasters are not only here to stay, but on the rise.

Response to emergencies and disasters is one of the mandates to OCHA. However, effective and efficient response depends on good preparedness and the implementation of a national policy of disaster reduction.

When the General Assembly of the United Nations repeatedly has focused on the need to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian emergency assistance it has done so because of a growing concern of the suffering of victims of disasters and emergency situations, the loss of lives, the flow of refugees, the mass displacement of people and the material destruction.

Disaster has always been a part of life in many countries, and each nation has developed tools on how to deal with their specific calamities. We find dykes that are hundreds of years old, build to protect a village or agricultural land from flooding. In other places people build high-rise houses above the flood level. People were able to take advantage of the nature, including normal floods. The situation today is that we no longer can talk about a "normal" disaster situation. Urbanization, population growth, climate change and environmental degradation have all long-term impacts. What we today might consider as extreme weather conditions, might in the next decades to come be the norm.

While good and coordinated response and disaster preparedness is important to level human suffering, we also have a responsibility to address the underlying causes for disaster to happened.

The Total Disaster Risk Management (TDRM) approach was formulated in close cooperation with stakeholders involved in disaster management work in Asia such as ADPC based in Bangkok, NGOs, Governments, UN agencies, donor representatives and the Asian Disaster

Reduction Center (ADRC) and OCHA. The TDRM approach is not a formula that suddenly came out of nowhere. It is a summarization of various initiatives and best practices from many countries. The TDRM approach is not a textbook with the correct answer given on the last page. It is a process bringing together available knowledge, best practices and experiences to help local and federal Governments to formulate a policy towards disaster reduction.

To share ideas and best practices in disaster risk management it is important to arrange meetings places. ADRC and OCHA have worked closely in promoting the idea of TDRM in Asia. Earlier this year we jointly organized the first international training of trainers workshop on TDRM here in Kobe bringing together disaster managers from 14 countries. We have before that co-organized a number of workshops, both in Japan and in disaster prone countries in Asia focusing on disaster reduction activities and their applications in each and every country. We have seen the importance of bringing people from different countries and cultures together, to create a meeting place where ideas and experiences could be exchanged and strengthen.

We could not have done this without the strong support from the ASEAN Foundations. I am most grateful for their kind contribution. I am also grateful for the support we have received from The Cabinet Office of Japan, Hyogo Prefecture Government, The Great Hansin –Awaji Earthquake Memorial Research Institute and the Nakauchi Foundation. You have all given valuable contribution towards this workshop.

This workshop will hopefully give us an opportunity to stop up for a minute to look at what we have achieved so far, what are the key challenges and in which directions should we move from her on. It has been proposed to arrange an international UN conference on disaster reduction in 2005, at the same time Kobe will mark the ten years anniversary of the Great Hansin-Awaji earthquake. The conference will aim at formulating a global strategy for disaster reduction. Your discussion in this conference will give important inputs to the process leading up to the conference in 2005. I hope you all will be active in this conference, crating network and sharing ideas and best practices with us. I wish you all a pleasant and fruitful stay in Kobe.

Thank you