

**Opening Speech**  
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Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen:

Welcome to Kobe City, Hyogo Prefecture. On behalf of the citizens of Hyogo Prefecture, I would like to express our sincere welcome to you all.

In January 1995, Kobe City with a population of over 1,400,000 people was directly hit by the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. Not only Kobe City but also many neighboring communities in Hyogo Prefecture had devastating damages. Since the earthquake, we have received kind support from all over the world. With this support and benevolence, we managed to help and encourage each other and made dedicated efforts towards reconstruction and rehabilitation. As a result of the heartfelt encouragement and efforts, the seriously affected areas have recovered to a remarkable degree. Overall reconstruction and rehabilitation are proceeding smoothly. However, according to the survey conducted by the board of education last month, some of the primary school and junior high school students in Hyogo Prefecture – and they are a quite number, 1,900 students - who had experienced directly the earthquake, are still suffering from mental instability and needing treatment. Faced with this survey result, we still see the aftermath of the great earthquake and the importance and need of caring the soft part of reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Now, talking about the disaster management system in this region, most of the cities and prefectures in Western Japan, including this prefecture at the time of the great earthquake occurred; we had a very efficient disaster management system mainly for floods and typhoons. Unfortunately, the preparedness for earthquake was not sufficient at all that time. Furthermore, we did not have a practical manual for the earthquake occurrences and the specific collaboration of rescue and relief organizations. Hence, those were not functioning sufficiently needless to mention. Based on these experiences drawn from the great earthquake, there were many points to be improved.

What we did as a prefectural government is not only to improve our own disaster management system in Hyogo prefecture, but also we strongly believe that we should send the message of our experiences and lessons learnt from the earthquake to the world, especially to the regions where disaster risk management, preparedness and prevention are in need imminently.

In October last year, as part of our effort on improving disaster management policy in the prefecture, we have founded the committee of Disaster Reduction Alliance in Kobe City where all the disaster management, health and welfare and environmental-oriented organizations are located. Asian Disaster Reduction Center (ADRC) and UN OCHA consist the leading committee of alliance with a goal of promoting the organizational collaboration between the related organizations located at the same complex. Thus, to fully demonstrate its own function and to contribute to the entire disaster management including the humanitarian aid domestically and internationally, Hyogo Prefecture would be giving its full support to this alliance and its activities.

It is significant that this conference aims at improving the capability for disaster reduction in Asia by sharing and exchanging knowledge of ways and forms of the disaster reduction practices in the region.

Finally, as mentioned by Mr. Katsuhiko Hara, Director for Disaster Preparedness, Cabinet Office of Japan, this conference serves as a pre-conference event of the United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2005. And we are approaching our national government, international society and the United Nations to hold the World Conference in 2005. And we would like to take this opportunity to ask for your support of the conference.

I hope this conference would be a very productive and active discussion indeed.

Thank you very much.