

**Multi-disciplinary and Inter-sectoral Collaboration and
Cooperation in Disaster Reduction**

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Introduction

I am honored and pleased to join you today in this international training program on Total Disaster Risk Management Approach and to share my insights and experience on collaboration and cooperation in disaster reduction and response.

As a former defense secretary and chairman of the National Disaster Coordinating Council of the Philippines, I am particularly pleased that this initiative endeavors to further strengthen the disaster risk reduction capacities of countries, by building on the gains of the past and sustaining the enthusiasm to make a difference in these challenging times..

I commend the ADRC and UN OCHA, and their regional partners here, for their initiative and exemplary collaboration in the advocacy for TDRM, a comprehensive, integrated and holistic approach to disaster reduction.

The collective effort to learn from past achievements and to examine marginalized issues is a rational step in addressing the disaster problem and in searching for more effective disaster reduction strategies.

Now, in dealing with investors, I appreciate their concern over risks, and the detrimental impact of disasters and crises on business and the economy. Indeed, to effectively pursue disaster reduction, the broadened involvement of each sector of society is important.

Rationale

It is alarming and disturbing that natural hazards and disasters around the world have been on the rise. Disasters precipitated by natural hazards reportedly have been affecting an average of 211 million people each year since 1991, exceeding the average of 31 million people affected by conflicts.

Our region, Asia, has borne the brunt of disasters caused by natural hazards, with 88% share of the affected people since 1975.

As disaster reporting becomes more efficient, we continue to witness an increasing trend in the frequency and severity of disasters and in the resultant losses of countries.

Improving our registry of small-scale emergencies may even reveal a grimmer reality, where scores are killed, injured and disabled each day on the road and in the workplace, due to prevalent hazards and uncontrolled risks.

In many cases, especially in less developed and developing countries, disasters effectively set back socio-economic development and impede achievement of sustainable development goals.

They cause substantial losses in proportion to gross domestic product. They also cause the channeling of limited resources to relief, recovery and reconstruction, which are more often inadequate.

In all indications, the vulnerability and risk to disasters, especially in Asia, will increase, and the impact of disasters will likely intensify, due to the prevalence of poverty, the increase in population growth and densities, the depletion of water resources, urbanization trends, global climate change and environmental degradation, among others.

ISDR reported in *Living With Risk* that the number of people at risk in the world has been growing by 70-80 million per year. And, more than 90 percent of population growth is in the developing world.

Moreover, rapid urbanization, increased mobility, and the inadequacy of coping systems and contingency measures have increased disaster potential and impact. The growing vulnerability and risk of communities have become evident also in the developed countries, as we have seen in the emergence of global terrorism and SARS.

Inevitably compounding the problem is the insufficiency of government action and foresight to address prevalent and emerging risks. For one, land use policy as a disaster reduction strategy still remain a critical issue in many developing countries, that requires priority attention and action.

Disasters can be a major obstacle to social and economic security, as well as political stability. If we are to pursue sustainable development, then, disaster reduction must be integral to sustainable development efforts. It must be a fundamental element of any development programme. In this regard, the pursuit of TDRM in Asia is a relevant and responsive initiative.

The immensity and complexity of the problem on disasters and risks convey foremost the message that no one person, group or society can address the disaster problem alone. Collaboration, cooperation and coordination in disaster reduction are essential and critical. We need to pull together and network our strengths and capacities, share available resources, and complement existing expertise to reduce vulnerabilities and to prevent and mitigate disasters more effectively.

Best practices in the Philippines

The emphasis of TDRM on collaboration, cooperation and coordination can be exemplified in programs and activities that require active partnership of government agencies, NGOs, civic groups, and specialized sectors at all levels. They pull together their respective strengths and capacities, including resources and expertise, as a strategy in pursuing disaster reduction activities. I am pleased to cite some cases from the Philippine experience:

Disaster prevention and mitigation

- *Brigada Kontra Baha for La Nina Mitigation.* Through collaboration among government agencies, local government authorities, local NGOs, and the AFP Engineering Brigade, the National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) coordinated the de-clogging of at least 11 critical waterways and chokepoints to mitigate flooding in Metro Manila in 1999-2000.

- *Earthquake vulnerability assessment of school buildings in Metro Manila.* Through collaboration among Department of Education, Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs), Association of Structural Engineers of the Philippines (ASEP), and the Office of Civil Defense, the NDCC initiated the earthquake vulnerability and risk assessment of school buildings in Metro Manila.

Disaster preparedness and response

- *Disaster drills and simulation exercises.* In collaboration with the private sector, the NDCC facilitated the conduct of disaster drills and simulation exercises in malls, banks, schools, hospitals, and communities at risk, among others. The NDCC, together with the Corporate Network for Disaster Response, also developed a training film on how to conduct drill: *7 Steps to Effective Disaster Simulation Exercise.*
- *Disaster reporting: Training for media professionals.* In collaboration with the Kapisanan ng mga Brodakaster sa Pilipinas (KBP) and the Emergency Management Institute of the Philippines (EMIP), the NDCC trained a core of media practitioners in effective and reliable disaster reporting.
- *The Broadcasters Manual on Emergency Preparedness.* This has allowed the media to serve as effective partners in public information and education.
- *Stop DEATH is an integrated health emergency preparedness and response program* that addresses altogether the problem of disasters, epidemics, accidents and trauma. Began in 1994, the program succeeded in human resource development through collaboration among Department of Health, Philippine College of Surgeons, Philippine Hospital Association, Philippine National Red Cross, and University of the Philippines College of Public Health, Boston University School of Public Health, and World Health Organization.
- *SAGIP 2000* exemplified the broadened collaboration and cooperation among 14 countries in disaster response and humanitarian assistance. The forum facilitated the sharing of information and country experience on early warning systems, decision and planning processes, mitigation and response mechanisms.

Disaster relief and recovery

- *Psychosocial services for disaster victims and responders.* The mental health program for disaster victims and response workers has been established formally in the health sector and in the AFP. Active providers of this service are the Department of Health, Department of Social Welfare and Development and the Armed Forces of the Philippines
- *Tabang Mindanaw, Bangun Mindanaw and Oplan Tulong Kapatid* exemplified multisectoral collaboration and cooperation in disaster relief and recovery. They facilitated the prompt provision of relief assistance and recovery projects by the private and government sectors to southern communities affected by humanitarian complex emergencies (1998-2000). They included relief assistance and recovery packages such livelihood generation and skills training.
- *International humanitarian mission to Taiwan.* The mission, comprised of 22 structural engineers and health professionals, extended technical expertise to the local architects

and engineers in conducting a rapid assessment of the structural damage and vulnerability of public infrastructures and lifelines resulting from the destructive earthquake of September 1999. The results of the assessment facilitated the return of victims to safe homes and the decongestion of evacuation centers.

Disaster reconstruction and rehabilitation

- *Rebuilding lifelines and infrastructures in Mindanao* required the collaboration and cooperation of government agencies, local government units concerned and the community leaders.
- *Mobilizing military support.* The AFP has played an important support role in building damaged lifelines and infrastructures, including schools and places of worship.

Conclusion

As I conclude, I recall the Chinese characters for disaster, which also convey both threat and opportunity. Truly, the challenge in any crisis is to recognize, beyond its detrimental consequences, the opportunities it presents for development.

Notwithstanding the enormous disaster problem we face today, and the threats it bears for our societies, we have come here in this forum, with the resolve to do more, to do better and to sustain the gains of our disaster reduction efforts.

This is the clear opportunity the prevailing problem presents: The opportunity to adopt a holistic and integrated approach to disaster reduction. The opportunity to involve all sectors of society and other disciplines. The opportunity to collaborate and cooperate on reducing disaster risk and vulnerability. Because our world today is much more interactive, the possible ways of exploring this opportunity are many.

There is wisdom in the old adage: "No man is an island entire of itself, each one is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." And, with commitment to action and political will, we can make that message work for us, for the greater benefit of human society.