

## **Foreword**

Asia has been the world's most disaster prone region, having suffered about half of the world's major disasters over the past five decades. The prevalence and magnitude of disasters have had serious consequences on human society and the economy. More recently, natural disasters had claimed more than 313,000 lives and affected close to one billion people from 1996 to 2000. The economic loss was estimated at 142 billion dollars. Each year, natural disasters impoverish millions of people in Asia.

The trend towards more frequent and severe disasters is anticipated to accelerate in the near future because of the disaster risks engendered by extreme depletion of water resources, rapid and unplanned urbanization, global climate change, and environmental degradation, among others. Consequently, initiatives on multilevel networking and collaboration have intensified among stakeholders in disaster reduction and response, including governments, UN agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and regional organizations. These initiatives aim to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of disaster reduction and response activities through integrated and cooperative efforts.

While there have been significant gains and contributions of governments, NGOs, and international organizations in addressing the persistent problem of disasters, the prevailing state of disasters, complicated by increasing disaster risks, calls for a holistic, integrated, multi-disciplinary and innovative approach to disaster reduction and response. However, the challenge still remains: to enhance the capacity at the local level and promote the active involvement of NGOs.

The critical role the NGOs have assumed in disaster reduction and response, including humanitarian action, and in complementing other development programs of government, has been widely acknowledged. More and more

NGOs are involved in disaster-related activities in Asia; however, networking and collaboration among them has been weak because of the lack of resources and organizational constraints. Yet, networking and enhancing the capability of the NGOs is considered an important strategy for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of disaster reduction and response activities, especially at the local level. These activities include training and public education, sharing of information, experience and expertise on best practice, and transferring of relevant technology in disaster reduction and response.

The Asian Disaster Reduction Centre (ADRC) and the Asian Disaster Response Unit of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Kobe office (ADRU/UN-OCHA Kobe office), believe in the strategic importance of promoting networking and collaboration among NGOs of Asian countries in the region. The NGOs of Asian countries are most familiar with the hazards, languages, customs and the environment at the local level and possess a wealth of experiences in disaster reduction and response. Moreover, networking and collaboration among the NGOs will facilitate further strengthening of local capacity and enable them to be the exponents of disaster reduction and response initiatives at the local level.

It is in this regard that the ADRC and ADRU/UN-OCHA Kobe office had jointly conducted the Regional Workshop on Networking and Collaboration among Non-governmental Organizations of Asian Countries in Disaster Reduction and Response on 20-22 February 2002 in Kobe, Japan. Thirty three international organizations and non-governmental organizations involved in disaster reduction and response at the regional and sub-regional levels attended and participated in the workshop.

The regional workshop had provided a forum for sharing views and experiences and for discussing the rationale, strategies and priority actions for fostering and facilitating networking and collaboration at the regional and local levels. Also, it has introduced the concept of Total Disaster Risk Management Approach which promotes better understanding of the underlying causes of disasters and emphasizes multi-level and multi-dimensional coordination and networking among stakeholders. Overall, the workshop assumes immense

significance in the continuing effort to strengthen existing institutional and organizational capacities and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of disaster reduction and response activities at all levels.

The ADRC and ADRU/UN-OCHA Kobe office are fully committed to sustaining the gains of this regional workshop and to pursuing the collective aims of the network of participating non-governmental organizations which they themselves have named the Asian Disaster Reduction and Response Network.