



WCDR HIGHLIGHTS: THURSDAY, 20 JANUARY 2005

Delegates to the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) continued to meet in sessions of the Intergovernmental and Thematic Segments on Thursday. In Plenary, the Conference heard a special session on the Indian Ocean disaster, followed by general statements by countries and intergovernmental and other organizations. The Main Committee continued addressing the draft framework for action, working late into the night to complete negotiations and address the draft declaration. In the Thematic Segment, a panel was convened on governance, institutional and policy frameworks for risk reduction. Throughout the day, fifteen sessions of the thematic clusters were held.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL SEGMENT

PLENARY: Special session on the Indian Ocean disaster:

WCDR President Murata opened the special session on the Indian Ocean disaster. K. Radhakrishnan, Director, Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services, presented an Indian initiative on a tsunami and storm surge early warning (EW) system. Jan Egeland, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, commended the international community's unprecedented response, noting that within three weeks nearly all those affected by the tsunami had food, shelter, and health, water and sanitation facilities.

President Murata then chaired a panel on country experiences. Chowdury Kamal Ibne Yousuf, Bangladesh's Minister of Food and Disaster Management, highlighted a successful cyclone preparedness programme. Adik Bantarso, Head, Bureau for Cooperation, Indonesia's National Coordination Agency for Refugee and Disaster Relief, underscored Indonesia's infrastructure damage. Tissa Vitarana, Sri Lanka's Minister of Science and Technology, noted the devastation of the fishing and tourism economy. Ashoka Kumar Rastogi, India's Disaster Management Secretary, highlighted search and rescue efforts. Dave Mwangi, Kenya's Permanent Secretary of Provincial Administration and National Security, explained Kenya's drought and flood EW system. Suporn Ratanakin, Foreign Relations Official, Thailand's Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, stressed tax, loan and regulatory relief for restoring livelihoods. Ian Wilderspin, Head of Disaster Risk Management Unit, International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), emphasized the importance of involving vulnerable populations in EW system design.

Li Xueju, China's Minister of Civil Affairs, announced an Asian conference on disaster reduction. Sadako Ogata, President, JICA, warned against "reconstructing poverty." Hans-Joachim Daerr, Germany's Director-General for Global Issues, the UN, Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid, offered to host an

international EW conference in early 2006. Howard Baker, Jr., US Ambassador to Japan, suggested calling upon the Global Earth Observation System of Systems to contribute to the EW system. Robert Owen-Jones, Environment Director, Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, recommended that Indian Ocean EW make use of existing EW systems elsewhere.

In the ensuing discussion, many delegations expressed sympathy to affected countries and stressed the importance of UN/OCHA coordination in delivering assistance. SWITZERLAND and TURKEY outlined national responses to the tsunami disaster. The EC outlined its intention to offer funding to bridge short-term humanitarian relief and long-term reconstruction. DENMARK highlighted the benefits of environmental rehabilitation, and SWEDEN stressed coastal management. Commending the international response to the disaster, the EU, UK, WFP and UNICEF stressed the need to also provide support to less conspicuous crises, such as hunger and HIV/AIDS. On an Indian Ocean EW system, JAPAN offered technological cooperation and data-sharing, the REPUBLIC OF KOREA committed its IT expertise, and the NETHERLANDS pledged financial support. SOUTH AFRICA urged that EW systems be people-based and MALAYSIA called for capacity building. FRANCE highlighted UNEP's local disaster prevention training programme. EGYPT stressed the importance of North-South cooperation. MOROCCO called for a tsunami EW system in the Mediterranean Sea.

WMO said EW systems should be available, in the long term, to all countries for all natural hazards. UNESCO announced a technical meeting from 3-8 March 2005 in Paris, France, to develop a common strategy for an Indian Ocean EW system. ILO stressed job creation strategies in reconstruction efforts. FAO emphasized damage to fisheries and agriculture. UNEP underscored the mitigating role of stable ecosystems. The BASEL CONVENTION SECRETARIAT introduced a guidance document for hazardous waste management in tsunami-struck areas. The INTERNATIONAL UNION OF GEODESY AND GEOPHYSICS recommended establishing regional disaster management centers. The COMPREHENSIVE NUCLEAR-TEST-BAN TREATY ORGANIZATION, the EUROPEAN SPACE AGENCY, the INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANIZATION and the WFP highlighted potential contributions of their existing programmes to an EW system. The ABDUS SALAAM INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR THEORETICAL PHYSICS discussed mega-earthquake prediction. The ASEAN SECRETARIAT stressed education and communication in disaster preparedness.

In conclusion, President Murata acknowledged support for the special session draft common statement.

MAIN COMMITTEE: Delegates worked throughout the day to address outstanding issues in the draft framework for action, returning to many of those taken up during discussions



on Tuesday and Wednesday. JAPAN agreed to remove reference to human security. On the US request for the WCDR President to make a statement on the non-binding nature of the framework for action during the closing session, the EU, with others, expressed concern about sending a negative signal to the outside world on the outcomes of the Conference. The US suggested referring to the framework as an "important political and humanitarian document." Chair Ferrari said he will raise the issue with the Bureau.

JAPAN and the US voiced strong objections to new EU text on the political determination of donor governments to mobilize resources. No headway was made on the paragraph on financial assistance to reduce risk.

On activities for reducing the underlying risk factors, the EU suggested adding language calling for the enhancement of ecosystem management to reduce the impact of disasters. BRAZIL suggested referring to the use and conservation of natural resources instead, but CAMEROON opposed the use of "conservation." Following informal discussions, delegates agreed to refer to encouraging the sustainable management of ecosystems, including through better land-use planning and development activities.

On social and economic development practices for reducing the underlying risk factors, the US opposed new language proposed by Iran to mention psychosocial assistance in the aftermath of disasters, arguing that the scope of the WCDR is confined to preparedness and does not include humanitarian action. The US will consult with Iran and others as to acceptable wording and placement of such language.

On key activities in identifying, assessing and monitoring disaster risks and enhancing early warning, TURKEY, with others, opposed by BANGLADESH, favored deleting reference to "shared river basins," as it detracts from the framework's universality. The US, supported by SOUTH AFRICA, ETHIOPIA and BOTSWANA, proposed adding "other water basins, bodies and areas." INDIA suggested referring to "water-based hazards." Interested parties agreed to draft common text informally.

On implementation and follow-up, the US expressed concern with text referring to the elaboration of an international convention on disaster risk reduction, suggesting instead the implementation and strengthening of "relevant legal instruments." This proposal was supported by CANADA, the RUSSIAN FEDERATION and SOUTH AFRICA. Opposed by the EU, JAPAN preferred not to mention "legal." COLOMBIA proposed that these instruments also be international. Delegates agreed to this addition, and to retaining "legal."

The EU then proposed an insertion calling on the IATF and ISDR to develop a set of generic targets and indicators to enable member States to measure their progress in implementing the framework for action, noting that the urgency of targets and indicators has been reinforced by the Indian Ocean disaster. The text proposes that targets and indicators be discussed at a substantive session of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Delegates offered initial observations on the proposal, many expressing support in principle, but requesting more time for its consideration. Several delegates preferred to remove reference to ECOSOC. Concern was also expressed about setting global targets, with several countries noting that setting targets and indicators is a national responsibility.

Delegates agreed on the importance of follow-up from the WCDR, and discussed at length an EU proposal that it include specific consideration of how disaster risks affect progress on the MDGs. Opposed by INDIA and several others, the US suggested deleting reference to the MDGs. After an inconclusive discussion on the mid-term or end-of-term review of the framework for action, Chair Ferrari called on interested delegations to meet informally to find a compromise.

Chair Ferrari then suggested that no new text be considered. AOSIS objected strongly and delegates agreed to consider a paragraph from the recent International Meeting to review the implementation of the BPOA, deliberating late into the night.

THEMATIC SEGMENT

THEMATIC CLUSTERS: Cluster 1 Panel: Governance, institutional and policy frameworks for risk reduction:

Glaudine Mtshali, South African Permanent Mission in Geneva, chaired the panel, and said good governance is a prerequisite to elevating disaster reduction on the development agenda.

Kenneth Westgate, Senior Regional Advisor, UNDP, highlighted the importance of political commitment, multi-stakeholder participation, and financial resources to achieve good governance in disaster risk reduction, and presented voluntary targets for governments. Keiichi Tango, Senior Executive Director, Japan Bank for International Cooperation, urged that disaster risk reduction programmes be linked to the MDGs and said investment in risk reduction is needed between disasters. Irmgard Schwaetzer, Chair, German Committee for Disaster Reduction, discussed the role of national platforms and said good governance in risk management requires a multi-stakeholder, multi-level and multi-disciplinary approach. Martin Owor, Assistant Commissioner, Uganda's Department of Disaster Preparedness and Refugees, noted that only a handful of African countries have developed national strategies for disaster reduction and stressed the need to identify all stakeholders at the outset of policy making to ensure effective strategy implementation. Khursid Alam, Policy Advisor for Action Aid International's International Emergency Team, emphasized the need for governance to be people-centered and ensure the participation of vulnerable groups.

The ensuing discussion focused on: overpopulation as a root cause of vulnerability; the need for accountability, coordination among donor agencies, and participatory approaches; and the role of national and regional platforms.

Cluster 3: Creating a culture of prevention – gender

balanced public awareness initiatives: This session was facilitated by Gloria Bratschi, Argentine prevention planning specialist. Cheryl Anderson, Gender and Disaster Network, reported on the production of the "Gender and Disaster Sourcebook." Mahdavi Ariyabandu, Intermediate Technical Development Group (ITDG), presented South Asian cases of mainstreaming gender in public education. Ramiro Batzin, Indigenous Council of Central America, reported on the Mayan application of the Riskland Game. Ana Maria Bejar, Save the Children UK, described gender-targeted disaster preparedness campaigns. Xavier Castellanos, IFRC, discussed the media's responsibility in disaster warning. Petro Ferradas, ITDG, focused on the rights of vulnerable populations in disasters. Rowena Hay, Umvoto Africa, discussed women as powerful actors in disaster reconstruction. Armine Mikayelyan, Women for Development, highlighted participation by women and children in the UN World Disaster Reduction Campaigns. Ricardo Pérez, Pan American Health Organization, reported on the use of radio soap operas for disaster awareness education.

IN THE CORRIDORS

While many delegates applauded the special session on the Indian Ocean disaster, some wondered whether such focus on a single drama would detract from the Conference's original goals. They argued that other disasters, such as drought, hunger and locust infestations, are not getting the attention they deserve. Such concerns were largely put to rest by several powerful interventions redirecting attention to these "silent tsunamis."

As the Conference enters its final stretch, participants focused on outputs, with several civil society and other groups preparing to pass judgment. While there was widespread appreciation for one such proposal – Japan's target to halve the number of lives lost to water related disasters by 2015 – some NGOs stressed the importance of addressing the challenges facing disaster survivors, such as displacement and loss of livelihoods. There was still talk of finding a way to develop time-bound targets, benchmarks and indicators, even if only in the follow-up to the Conference.