



## WCDRR HIGHLIGHTS:

### SATURDAY, 14 MARCH 2015

The third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction opened on Saturday in Sendai, Japan, attended by approximately 20 Heads of State and Government, many country delegations, and 8,000 participants. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Prime Minister of Japan Shinzō Abe and many other dignitaries addressed the conference. Member States engaged in an exchange of views throughout the day, with many delegates expressing their hope and intention that the Conference will produce a strong outcome on a post-2015 disaster risk reduction (DRR) framework.

In the afternoon, a high-level multi-stakeholder partnership dialogue on mobilizing women’s leadership in DRR and several working sessions on topics including technological hazards, disaster risk transfer and insurance, and commitments to safe schools took place.

Delegates agreed to form a Main Committee to negotiate and finalize the draft post-2015 framework on DRR. The Main Committee met in the afternoon.

#### OPENING CEREMONY

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomed delegates to Sendai, highlighting their important role in bringing about a post-2015 framework for DRR.

Delegates elected, by acclamation, Eriko Yamatani, Minister of State for Disaster Management, Japan, as conference president. Yamatani then received Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko of Japan on the podium, where they listened to several of the opening addresses.

Yamatani welcomed progress in the decade since the second World Conference on Disaster Reduction adopted the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 (HFA), noting its value as a guideline for global action on DRR, and adding that a strengthened post-2015 framework is required to address gaps.

Ban said an ambitious outcome at the WCDRR will put the world on a path to a new sustainable development agenda in 2015, together with the forthcoming Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and a meaningful climate change agreement. He expressed the conference’s solidarity with the people of Vanuatu in the face of Cyclone Pam and called on delegates to build true resilience through establishing strong bonds among countries and communities.

Shinzō Abe, Prime Minister of Japan, expressed appreciation for the international community’s assistance in response to the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, emphasized the concept of “building back better,” and called on participants to share experiences and lessons learned in order to agree on a strong post-2015 framework on DRR.

Stressing the need for new actions to address DRR and climate change concurrently, Laurent Fabius, incoming president of the 21st Session of the Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP 21), launched an appeal to assist the most vulnerable through a “Climate Disaster Warning” mechanism. He expressed hope that COP 21 would result in a “Paris Climate Alliance” comprising a universal and differentiated agreement, national contributions, financial means and a “solutions agenda.”

Regina Pritchett, Major Groups representative, shared her experience of working with grassroots women in recovery and reconstruction, calling on participants to remember their interconnectedness and to take time to consider “the bigger picture.”

Emiko Okuyama, Mayor of Sendai, expressed hope that Sendai’s experiences in dealing with disaster would be reflected in the DRR strategies adopted at the conference

Speaking on behalf of Sam Kutesa, President of the UN General Assembly, King Mswati III of Swaziland called for the strengthening of international cooperation and partnerships to enhance resilience, urging delegates to use the WCDRR and meetings on the post-2015 development agenda in New York, financing for development in Addis Ababa, and the climate COP in Paris, as opportunities to present “a unified vision with concrete deliverables.”

#### ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS

Delegates adopted, by acclamation, the agenda of the conference (A/CONF.224/1/Rev.1), the programme of work (A/CONF.224/2) and its addendum (A/CONF.224/2/Add.1), and the rules of procedure (A/CONF.224/3).

They elected vice-presidents to the conference by acclamation, including an *ex officio* vice-president from the host country, Japan, and two vice-presidents from each regional group: Bangladesh and Thailand for Asia-Pacific; the Czech Republic and Russian Federation for Eastern Europe; Ecuador and Jamaica for Latin America and the Caribbean (GRULAC); Finland and Switzerland for Western Europe and Other Groups (WEOG); and Egypt and South Sudan for Africa. They elected Toni Frisch (Switzerland) as General Rapporteur.

Delegates agreed to form a Main Committee to take forward negotiations of the draft post-2015 framework on DRR. They requested the co-chairs of the Preparatory Committee, Päivi Kairamo (Finland) and Thani Thongphakdi (Thailand), to continue to serve in the same roles on the Main Committee.

Delegates elected Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Denmark, Jamaica, Namibia, Senegal, the Russian Federation and the US to serve on the Credentials Committee.



## GENERAL EXCHANGE OF VIEWS

Shinzō Abe, Prime Minister, Japan, announced funding of US\$4 billion for the Sendai Cooperation Initiative for DRR, focusing on institution-building, material assistance and the promotion of regional cooperation. He said DRR “must evolve” together with the post-2015 development agenda.

Several high-level delegates, including President of Kenya Uhuru Kenyatta and President of Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe, emphasized the links among international discussions and negotiations on DRR, financing for development, climate change and the post-2015 development agenda. Speakers shared their national experiences of developing DRR strategies and promoting regional cooperation, such as the five-State cooperation in the Caspian Sea region mentioned by Turkmenistan President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov.

In the wake of Cyclone Pam’s destruction, Vanuatu President Baldwin Lonsdale informed delegates that up to 260,000 people in his country could be affected and appealed for assistance.

Han Seung-soo, Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for DRR and Water, recognized progress on early warning systems and disaster preparedness, but cautioned that lack of capacity in developing countries still limits their ability to cope with disasters. He noted that, in the last 30 years, estimated costs due to disasters amounted to US\$3.5 trillion, and concluded stating, “Sustainability must start in Sendai.”

## MAIN COMMITTEE

Delegates reviewed the draft text in an informal session in the afternoon, focusing on the preamble.

On the toll of disasters from 2005-2015, delegates agreed to replace a reference to “vulnerable groups” with “people in vulnerable situations.”

On a reference to underlying disaster risk drivers, they agreed to refer to “weak institutional arrangements,” rather than “weak governance,” and to mention, separately, the need for “strengthened governance” on various levels.

On limited access to technology as a driver of risk, one country raised concerns about such language undermining intellectual property regimes, whereas others said the concern was misplaced, as the text was only descriptive.

They discussed a reference to “conflict and foreign occupation situations” as drivers of risk, with some countries saying that conflict is a political issue which should be dealt with in other fora, and others fearing the lack of this reference could make achievement of post-2015 DRR targets more difficult.

## HIGH-LEVEL PARTNERSHIP DIALOGUE

**Mobilizing Women’s Leadership in DRR:** Riz Khan, news anchor, moderated the session. Session co-chair Senator Loren Legarda, the Philippines, noted the disproportionate number of women affected by disasters in the past 10 years, while co-chair Sanae Takaichi, Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications, Japan, highlighted women’s knowledge and wisdom in response to the 2011 earthquake in Japan.

Shinzō Abe, Prime Minister, Japan, noted that women are often on the frontline in disaster response, highlighting a growing number of women as firefighters, evacuation center operators, and primary disaster response providers in the home.

Panelists stressed that empowering women in DRR is a smart investment with a good payback and called for approaches that provide resources directly to women in emergency situations. They pointed to evidence that involving women in decision making before, during and after an emergency ensures better welfare outcomes for women, children and men. Others called for political leadership to ensure a gender-responsive post-2015 DRR framework, with one highlighting the importance of women’s community radio in communicating early warning messages.

Participants raised issues including the need for, and use of, disaggregated data to inform the DRR targets.

## WORKING SESSIONS

**Technological Hazards - From Risk Reduction To Recovery:** Elhadj As Sy, Secretary-General, International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, moderated the session.

Izumi Nakamitsu, UN Development Programme, discussed how communities respond to technological and nuclear disasters, stressing the need for nuanced and comprehensive support to those affected.

Panelists spoke on the management of uranium tailings in Kyrgyzstan; plans to address cascading risks due to cyclones, floods and droughts in Madagascar; short- and long-term measures to deal with nuclear disasters considering lessons from Chernobyl; and lessons from the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant accident. Among other issues, participants considered the role and importance of local-level engagement in the management of technological disasters.

**Disaster Risk Transfer and Insurance:** Arup Chatterjee, Asian Development Bank, moderated the session. Senior government and industry representatives on this panel presented on how public-private partnership approaches that engage the insurance/reinsurance sector in pricing risk help drive efficient DRR and disaster response. They also highlighted the potential for public-private cooperation to increase disaster insurance penetration levels and to sustain livelihoods in the wake of significant disasters. Panel members stressed insurance as a critical part of the DRR agenda that needs greater prominence in the post-2015 framework. Participants called on industry to design insurance products affordable for vulnerable sectors.

**UN High-Level Meeting:** Achim Steiner, Executive Director, UN Environment Programme (UNEP), moderated this session, which discussed DRR priorities in the context of the post-2015 development agenda, organized by the UN High-Level Committee on Programmes Senior Management Group on DRR for Resilience (HLCP/SMG). UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon underscored the UN system’s commitment to support states and communities in advancing DRR policies, based on the Sendai outcomes. Stating that “more than funding is required,” Ban suggested actions such as strengthening vulnerable communities. Steiner concluded by highlighting inter-linkages between development and DRR actions, and the cost-effectiveness of prevention and preparedness.

**Commitments to Safe Schools:** Kim Sung-joo, Head of the Korean Red Cross, moderated the session, which discussed country initiatives related to improvement of DRR measures in schools focusing on: recovery and rehabilitation; preparedness; response; prevention; and mitigation. Building on the Worldwide Initiative for Safe Schools, countries including Nigeria, Iran, the Philippines, Indonesia and Turkey highlighted development of expertise and national programmes to advance resilience measures. Panelists emphasized the need to involve local communities, parents, teachers and youth, as well as the importance of developing plans for each school through workshops and building the capacity of local leaders. Kim concluded by highlighting the importance of early warning measures, and inviting countries to join the initiative.

## IN THE CORRIDORS

Straight after the WCDRR opening ceremony, the newly formed Main Committee began its work of finalizing the draft post-2015 framework for DRR, amidst feeling that the previous day’s Preparatory Committee, which initially planned to complete this task, had been merely “a warm-up session.” Progress, however, was slow. Some lamented that issues that were considered settled in the previous Geneva-based discussions were being reopened, while others asserted that text that was still contentious should not be reflected in the draft. Nevertheless, the co-chairs were in good spirits, as one announced, “I feel like tackling difficult issues today” - a statement that the Main Committee greeted with spontaneous applause, considering that the presence of so many ministers at WCDRR could provide both the opportunity and the impetus for reaching agreement.