

Sendai Review Highlights: Thursday, 18 May 2023

Delegates convened at UN Headquarters in New York City on Thursday to begin the High-Level Meeting of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on the Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) 2015-2030. In the morning, a Political Declaration on the Midterm Review was adopted. Several Risk Reduction Hub events and a Leaders Roundtable lunch also took place to continue discussions on DRR outside the formal UNGA process.

High-Level Meeting on the Midterm Review

The High-Level Meeting was convened by the President of the UN General Assembly under the theme “Working Together to Reduce Risk for a Resilient Future.”

Opening Segment: UNGA President Csaba Kőrösi opened the High-Level Meeting, inviting delegates to take up agenda item 18(c): high-level meeting on the midterm review of the Sendai Framework. Quoting Robert Louis Stephenson’s observation that “It is the mark of a good action that it appears inevitable in retrospect,” he said the 2015 Sendai Framework was ahead of its time. However, he expressed deep concern that we are not on track to achieve its aims, with disasters increasing significantly since 2015. Stating that this review is our last chance to change course before 2030, he said we must move rapidly beyond “extractive and transactional behaviors” and narrow indicators like gross domestic product (GDP), and instead embrace inclusion and solidarity. He urged everyone to “anticipate risk, calculate, factor in, prepare, prevent, respond rapidly, and build the lessons learned into the next action plans.”

Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the UN, said we must acknowledge that progress on the Sendai Framework has been inadequate, costing hundreds of thousands of lives and adversely affecting millions more. Drawing attention to the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, as well as growing inequality, financial shocks, and other crises, she said the world is at a “defining point in history.” Highlighting the critical importance of DRR, she urged building resilience at every scale, improving our understanding of risk, upgrading our governance and financial systems, and moving away from short-termism. She called for a “dramatic change from managing disasters to managing risk” and a focus on prevention. “This,” she said, “can only be achieved if we work together.”

Mami Mizutori, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for DRR and Head of UNDRR, emphasized that the Midterm Review showed the need to better understand risks and their cascading impacts, and demonstrated the important role of civil society. She urged focusing on the local level, increasing multilateral cooperation, and enhancing preparedness and effectiveness of responses. Mizutori lamented that progress remains unequal across geographical and income levels and called for risk-informed investments and behavior for a future “filled not with fear but with hope.”

Mwanahamisi Singano, Women and Gender Stakeholder Group and Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), noted that 2015 was a historic year with the adoption of the Sendai Framework, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Paris Agreement. Stressing that the Sendai Framework is “a crucial pillar of our collective vision,” she emphasized that the Report of the Midterm Review on implementation shows that work has not been done on the scale and pace required. Singano underscored that implementation is not easy but is necessary, as inaction comes at a significant cost.

Mustafa Kemal Kilinç, Türkiye earthquake survivor, discussed his experience from the recent earthquake in Türkiye and Syria. Describing the feeling of vulnerability and shock following the disaster as well as the challenges facing the search and rescue teams, he expressed gratitude for all the countries and organizations that offered support and hoped that work under the Sendai Framework would lead to fewer disaster victims around the world.

Adoption of the Political Declaration: President Kőrösi introduced the draft political declaration of the high-level meeting on the midterm review of the Sendai Framework (A/77/L.70). Delegates adopted the Declaration. Following the adoption, Venezuela, on behalf of the Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the UN, stressed that the Sendai Framework is an integral part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and urging refraining from unilaterally imposing economic, financial, and trade measures not in line with the UN Charter.

Plenary: Delegates met in plenary throughout the day and into the evening to hear national perspectives on implementation of the Sendai Framework and actions to advance risk-informed action. The theme of the session was “Charting liveable pathways for humans and nature.”

Katalin Éva Veresné Novák, President of Hungary, emphasized the need to “protect ourselves and assist each other,” describing the Hungary Helps Programme, which has sponsored 300 humanitarian and rehabilitation projects in 54 countries with USD 100 million in assistance.

Mark Anthony Phillips, Prime Minister, Guyana, underlined the vulnerability of his region, including that 50 percent of economic losses related to climate change occur in Latin America and the Caribbean. He looked forward to the completion of the multidimensional vulnerability index and speedy establishment of the loss and damage fund, pointing to the importance of climate justice.

Siaosi ‘Ofakivahafolau Sovaleni, Prime Minister of Tonga, highlighted the regional 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent. He emphasized the need to strengthen governance and institutions and focus on contextualizing risk informing development initiatives by targeting investments, but said it cannot be done on “a piecemeal basis.”

Many government ministers and other high-level officials then addressed the plenary. Key themes to emerge during their interventions included progress to date on the Sendai Framework; the impact of recent crises; the use of data, science, and technology; early warning systems; linkages with other UN

processes; multi-stakeholder involvement and collaboration; and solidarity between countries and communities. Many speakers also welcomed the political declaration adopted earlier in the day, and almost all highlighted their domestic legislation, policies and actions to date.

Regarding **progress made on implementing the Sendai Framework**, several speakers noted progress in some areas, such as the use of technology and early warning systems. However, many more observed that advances had been undermined and overshadowed by recent crises. The EU said the risk landscape has changed profoundly since 2015, with the list of challenges now long and growing.

On the **impact of recent or emerging crises**, FIJI, BARBADOS, CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, INDONESIA and the PHILIPPINES referred to the harmful impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. FIJI said the pandemic has taught us that traditional linear thinking about disaster management must be left in the past, and the changing risk landscape requires building resilience across systems.

Some speakers highlighted the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. St. Lucia, speaking for the CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY (CARICOM), referred to "a weakened multilateral system."

Many speakers, including small island developing states (SIDS), CARICOM, least developed countries, and other vulnerable countries, highlighted climate change and the recent increase and intensity of extreme weather events, ranging from drought and floods to heatwaves and cyclones. These, they said, had caused significant impacts across the globe and derailed many DRR efforts. The MALDIVES said climate change was already causing huge suffering and losses. Noting the causal relationship between climate change and the rise in disasters, she said many need systemic and innovative solutions. ESWATINI highlighted chronic food insecurity as a priority issue.

On **data, science, and technology**, BARBADOS noted the value of periodic assessment, monitoring and reporting, and urged evidence-based, targeted action that is timely, pragmatic, and people-centered. Many countries, including ESWATINI, also highlighted the need to continue improving the understanding of risk. GREECE outlined national efforts focused on scientific knowledge and expertise, data, monitoring, modeling, and collaboration.

Regarding **early warning systems**, ZAMBIA highlighted its importance, but noted many countries face barriers to implementation. CARICOM urged technology transfer. KIRIBATI highlighted the need for multilevel early warning systems. South Africa, speaking for the AFRICAN GROUP, supported the UN system Early Warning for All Initiative. POLAND highlighted a new national text messaging system to warn citizens of dangerous events and raise awareness.

On **resilience**, CARICOM urged building resilience and critical infrastructure, and improving disaster preparedness and response plans, as well as building local resilience and promoting community-led work. The EU affirmed its resolve to support DRR and greater resilience both internally and internationally. Plans include strengthened disaster preparedness, increased funding focused on building back better, and more cooperation. He also urged colleagues to "prepare for the worst while aiming for the best."

GHANA highlighted investment in resilient infrastructure. LUXEMBOURG called for a transition towards an anticipatory and resilience-based approach. GREECE highlighted prevention, preparedness, and resilience.

The SEYCHELLES, highlighted SIDS' infrastructure vulnerability, particularly reliance on a small number of ports and airports. Rather than being small, he said SIDS are actually "large oceanic nations" with big exclusive economic zones and enormous challenges. BANGLADESH noted progress in reducing deaths from recent disasters, and urged enhanced regional and international cooperation. ARMENIA highlighted good governance.

On **financing**, delegates highlighted the escalating costs of DRR, with many developing countries urging greater Official Development Assistance and other financial support. ESWATINI said the financing of disaster risk management remained one of the biggest challenges for countries with small economies. He described national efforts to build a disaster management fund, noting early concerns that it will not be sufficient to meet the costs of loss and damage. CARICOM urged scaling-up disaster response financing and reforming the international financial system. FIJI supported risk-informed investments and more public-private collaboration. MOZAMBIQUE highlighted its efforts to improve access to disaster insurance. She also urged the international community to operationalize funding mechanisms such as the loss and damage fund.

NORWAY reiterated plans to double climate-related financing by 2026 and triple resilience-related support. She noted that the private sector will play a key role in future DRR efforts. GHANA called for innovative mechanisms to finance DRR measures. ANGOLA said economic losses from disasters divert funds that could be used for health, education, and other needs.

INDIA reported his country's significant investment in DRR and preparedness, response, and recovery. He said infrastructure investments, if informed by sound risk assessments, can be a long-term investment that builds resilience.

The AFRICAN GROUP drew attention to a serious financing gap in terms of ODA. He highlighted agreements in recent UN climate negotiations to double adaptation finance and operationalize a loss and damage fund at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change 28th meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 28). PAKISTAN proposed a dedicated DRR fund separate from climate-focused funding windows. ROMANIA urged funding not only short-term disaster responses but long-term disaster preparedness.

Many speakers supported **multi-stakeholder involvement** and local, regional, and global collaboration. Fiji, on behalf of the PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM, highlighted the need for an inclusive and collaborative approach. He also outlined various regional actions to implement the Sendai Framework, and highlighted the need for timely and localized risk information. At the country level, he noted Fiji's commitment to a "whole of government and whole of society" approach. Finally, he supported Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge, and welcome work on the DRR Gender Action Plan.

NORWAY said we must ensure a gender perspective and a human rights approach engaging the whole of society. LUXEMBOURG emphasized the need for clear and accessible information, noting that informed citizens are more resilient, better prepared, and less vulnerable.

The Philippines, on behalf of the ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN), recommended mainstreaming DRR across all sectors; placing communities at the heart of DRR and resilience-building efforts; and cooperation between regional and global mechanisms. GERMANY and others endorsed a "whole of government" and holistic approach.

On **linkages with other UN processes and issues**, ZAMBIA stressed the need to accelerate implementation of the Sendai Framework as part of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, and noted the approaching SDG Summit and the first Global Stocktake of the Paris Agreement, which will conclude at UNFCCC COP 28. GHANA stressed the need to address the linkages between climate change and DRR, and to provide healthy ecosystems to future generations.

ANGOLA said insufficient progress implementing the Sendai Framework threatens to undermine the SDGs, the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework, and climate goals. She further drew attention to the One Health approach and its relevance to disaster resilience. SWITZERLAND said sustainable development is only possible if we absorb the shocks that affect us.

Many delegates called for **solidarity** among nations. Developing countries referenced their support for Türkiye during

its recent devastating earthquake. BELGIUM highlighted the intersectoral and transnational nature of crises, stressing the need for international collaboration for a wider vision regarding crisis management. Indonesia, on behalf of the MIKTA Group (Mexico, Indonesia, South Korea, Türkiye, and Australia), highlighted MIKTA's commitment to disaster preparedness, responsiveness, cooperation, and sharing best practices. JAPAN urged delegates to "move forward together," and called for solidarity and cooperation among countries. INDIA urged delegates to "leave no one behind, leave no place behind, and leave no ecosystem behind."

Leaders' Roundtables: In between a morning and evening plenary, delegates attended a productive "working lunch" co-hosted by UNDRR and UNGA President Csaba Kőrösi. Mami Mizutori, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for DRR and Head of UNDRR, said the aim of the roundtables was to embody a whole-of-society approach to identifying the "game changers" that can revolutionize how we can act on risk.

Kőrösi said one intent of the roundtables was to prepare for next steps after the close of the meeting and move away from reactive problem-driven modes of operating. He said that "people, economies, and environment are connected and crises are similarly interconnected," that reducing disasters requires a comprehensive and integrated approach. He added that neither conventional solutions nor scaled up conventional solutions are enough. "We need a radical change in how we define and address risks," he said, adding the need to use knowledge, data, and evidence from science and traditional wisdom.

Pointing to the lunch roundtable format, Amina Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the UN, joked with delegates that there was "no free lunch." She underlined the importance of risk analysis, policy coordination, and risk response, highlighting that the majority of investment is spent after a disaster occurs, yet one euro spent yields six euros in savings plus hundreds of thousands of lives when it comes to disaster risk prevention. She said replenishment of the Green Climate Fund and a doubling of adaptation finance were essential. She also underscored integrated financing that includes concessional lending, additional financing streams, effective debt restricting streams, and criteria for access to finance and debt that go beyond GDP. She recommended moving from project-based approaches to systemic support to countries, balancing response with prevention.

Leader Roundtables were organized around ten themes. Each table reported back key messages and "game changing ideas," including:

Risk-informed sustainable development depends on honoring international commitments, including the most vulnerable, early in the design of risk management, and engaging more parliamentarians to address disaster-related challenges. Ideas for addressing these challenges include purposeful taxation; installing permanent risk assessment and risk management at national, state, and regional levels; linking national and global risk reduction governance; creating a facility to de-risk the financial system; developing coordinating bodies for pre-disaster phase and management of the disaster; and integrating user-centered designs into design planning.

A comprehensive approach to climate and disaster risk management requires more collaboration and coordination on climate change and DRR, and this needs to be advanced at UNFCCC COP 28. More information and data sharing is needed.

Risk-informed investment and financing DRR will require major reform in perspectives on international finance. Collective thinking, multistakeholder environments, ensuring that money is spent "in the smartest way," and ensuring that governments or institutions are not creating barriers to investment, are critical.

Preventing risk and capitalizing on opportunities from rapid technological change and other frontier risks will benefit from the replication of good practices. More investments are needed in innovative data collection, developing early warning capabilities, and supporting access to electricity and the internet for enhanced communication.

A One Health approach to ecosystem health and pandemic preparedness depends on a global reframing of health and adapting systemic approaches. This includes creating a better connection between the Global Health Security Index, the Sendai Framework, the International Health Regulations, and the Global Health Security Agenda. In addition, more connections between academics and policy makers are needed, such as connecting academia to early warning systems.

Resilient infrastructure systems for the 21st century and beyond and the importance of policymaking means there is responsibility to identify and monitor risks, and to complement standards with regulation. Public-private cooperation is critical, especially on resilient and green infrastructure and renewable energy supply.

Water for resilience is a key issue and supporting deeper integration across sectors and at the local level is needed. Involving and developing capacity building for youth is essential.

National and subnational legislative frameworks for DRR depend on consultation with communities and youth in the consideration of risks. Disaster risks need to be built into laws and existing frameworks.

Governing disaster risk in fragile contexts is not "one size fits all." Multidimensional risk assessment, developing local partners and leadership, and building local adaptation and resilience are critical for the implementation of national strategies. There is a need to localize national and global risk reduction agendas, and early warning and anticipatory action are critical in fragile settings and tied to pre-agreed financing frameworks.

Multi-hazard early warning systems for all must start with inclusion of people with disabilities in the design of the system. Other needs include more science and technology; promoting open source and free data; inclusion of minorities, women, and youth; ensuring that early warning systems are embedded at all levels; and making technical capacity a financial priority.

Risk Reduction Hub

The Risk Reduction Hub, coordinated by the UNDRR reconvened on Thursday morning to consider four topics: DRR in countries affected by multidimensional crisis; Early Warnings For All; the role of states in promoting investments in DRR; and DRR and education online.

In the Corridors

"Disasters in all their horror can bring the global community together," noted a delegate after the smooth adoption of the Political Declaration of the High-Level meeting on the Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework. Pointing to disaster diplomacy that can induce cooperation even among traditional enemies, he joked that, in other fora, agreeing on such a declaration would require lengthy, strenuous negotiations.

It was soon evident, however, that it would take much more to address the world's polarization. The intervention by the Group of Friends in Defense of the Charter of the UN, pointing to unilaterally imposed economic, financial, and trade measures not in line with the UN Charter, revealed that establishing an environment of positive cooperation and mutual trust is a complex path.

Interventions by high-level representatives of the world's governments explored that complex path for the rest of the day and into the night in a marathon plenary session. They highlighted the need for disaster risk to be central to sustainable development at all levels through a whole-of-society approach. They further reiterated the imperative not to leave anyone behind and underscored the importance of successfully implementing the Sendai Framework for a future, in the words of UNDRR Head Mami Mizutori "filled not with fear but with hope."

The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of the High-Level Meeting of the Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction will be available on Monday, 22 May 2023 at enb.iisd.org/midterm-review-sendai-framework-disaster-risk-reduction.



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