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## Extracts from opening address

We are here today to offer our leadership and expertise to one of the increasingly urgent – but eminently solvable – challenges we face in the 21st century: namely, reducing the death and destruction wrought by natural hazards, and helping save lives and livelihoods in some of the poorest and most vulnerable parts of the globe. Over the past 30 years, the number of disasters – storms, floods and droughts – has increased threefold. Five times more people are now affected than just a generation ago. Global warming makes our task still more urgent, and our responsibility, ever more grave.

The challenge before us is formidable. But the way forward is well signposted, with the Hyogo Framework for Action as our roadmap. Created two years ago by 168 governments and numerous expert organizations, the Hyogo Framework sets clear priorities for actions to strengthen the resilience of nations and communities to disasters.

I am therefore particularly pleased to welcome representatives from the more than 100 Governments who are with us today. I also welcome the many representatives – both veterans and newcomers – from UN organizations, financial and academic institutions, NGOs, and civil society. Each of your perspectives is needed. All of your contributions are welcome and necessary.

We need to move forward together, united by a sense of purpose and urgency. We have the right tool: the Hyogo Framework for Action – with the key word being that last one. Action. We have the proper international mechanism: the ISDR system. And we have the requisite knowledge and experience to reduce disaster risks from Teheran to Toronto, Lima to Lagos. What we need is precisely concerted action to make these elements count together.

Climate change is the driver of the increased urgency of risk reduction efforts. What does this mean in practice? It means national action plans for adaptation. It means strengthening public infrastructure, coastal facilities, and homes to withstand more extreme weather, flooding and rising waters. Better drought management. Better early warning systems and evacuation plans. It means stronger building codes. Improved land and water management policies. Expanded disaster education programmes for local communities. All of this backed by stronger institutions and proper funding. Disaster risk reduction is our front-line defence in adapting to the impacts of climate change and preventing future loss of life and property from extreme natural hazards.

Disaster risk reduction needs to become a top priority for Governments, municipalities, civic leaders, businesses, and local communities. Last year, 134 million people suffered from natural hazards that cost \$35 billion in damage, including devastating droughts in China and Africa and massive flooding across Asia and Africa. One of the most potent arguments for risk reduction is also the simplest: “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”.

A recent expert study in the United States showed that one dollar invested today in disaster risk reduction saved four dollars in the future cost of relief and rehabilitation - a bargain by any standard. We need to do more to publicize our arguments and to make a more convincing case for risk reduction. Disaster risk reduction is an essential insurance policy for the more disaster-prone world we expect.

But to be genuinely convincing, we also need to know what we can and must do in practice. First, we must prioritize those countries and areas at greatest risk for earthquakes, floods and other natural hazards. We must build “smarter and safer” where populations are most vulnerable. Second, we must act to protect the world’s investment in development. In 1998, Hurricane Mitch caused losses equal to 41 per cent of Honduras’s gross domestic product (GDP). In the Maldives, the equivalent of 66 per cent of its GDP was wiped out by the 2004 tsunami. We can reduce these huge losses by weaving risk reduction policies into the overall fabric of international lending and development policies. Finally, we must continue to strengthen the institutional pillars that support disaster risk reduction, through reinforcing our partnerships – amongst ISDR members, between government and non-governmental organisations, and between the public and private sectors.

Natural hazards need not lead automatically to human catastrophe. By taking simple, cost effective steps today, we can reduce risks and save lives tomorrow. Disaster risk reduction is an idea whose time has come. That is why we must combine our efforts and support investment to reduce our vulnerability. So, let us use our ISDR system and this Global Platform to make a real difference on the ground for millions of people. The time is right; the need is urgent; you, the key players, are here. What we must do is act decisively and boldly to meet the challenge.

#### **Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters**

The Hyogo Framework<sup>1</sup> was adopted by 168 governments at the World Conference for Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan in January 2005. It seeks to achieve a substantial reduction of disaster losses in lives and in the social, economic and environmental assets.

It identifies five priorities for action:

1. Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation.
2. Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning.
3. Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels.
4. Reduce the underlying risk factors.
5. Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.

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<sup>1</sup> Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters:  
<http://www.unisdr.org/eng/hfa/hfa.htm>