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Introduction

This first session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction² held in Geneva, Switzerland, 5-7 June 2007 was convened on the basis of guidance contained in the resolution of the General Assembly on the ISDR that calls for the adoption by governments of the Hyogo Framework and that recognizes the Global Platform as a successor mechanism to the Inter-Agency Task Force for Disaster Reduction.

National practitioners and other stakeholders have repeatedly expressed the desire to have a mechanism through which they can exchange their experiences in disaster risk reduction and access information on how other countries addressed particular challenges in the implementation of the Hyogo Framework. The Global Platform has been set up to serve this need, and it is expected to become the main global forum for all parties involved in disaster risk reduction, namely governments, United Nations agencies, international financial institutions, regional bodies, civil society, the private sector, and the scientific and academic communities. It will provide advocacy for effective action to reduce disaster risks, will expand the political space devoted to the issue, and will contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals particularly in respect to poverty reduction and environmental sustainability.

Participants in this first session included representatives of 124 Member States of the United Nations, 19 of whom were of ministerial status, and 105 regional, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations that are actively engaged in the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR – see box), including members of the predecessor platform, the Inter-Agency Task Force on Disaster Reduction (IATF/DR)³. There were 1,171 participants altogether, drawn from the various sectors, particularly the development and humanitarian fields and the environmental and scientific fields related to disaster risk reduction.

The key aims of the session were to raise awareness and commitment to reduce disaster risks, to share experience and good practice, and to provide global guidance on strategies for risk reduction at international, regional, national and local levels.

The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) is a United Nations-mandated global strategy to engage a wide range of actors in a coordinated effort to reduce the risks of disasters and to build “a culture of prevention” in society as part of sustainable development. The ISDR system comprises the cooperative mechanisms, including most importantly the Global Platform, through which governments, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, international financial institutions, technical institutions and networks, and civil society organizations interact, share information and collaborate on risk reduction programmes and activities. The ISDR system is supported by the ISDR secretariat.

² Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction: <http://www.preventionweb.net/globalplatform/index.html>

³ Inter-Agency Task Force on Disaster Reduction: <http://www.unisdr.org/eng/task%20force/tf-functions-responsibilities-eng.htm>

The ISDR system is also growing at regional and sub-regional levels, where existing bodies are increasingly convening and co-ordinating disaster risk reduction initiatives, and at national level where a number of countries have created national platforms to advocate for and coordinate disaster risk reduction activities.

The successful organization of the Global Platform would not have been possible without extensive contributions from many ISDR partners, as follows.

An informal advisory group to the ISDR secretariat for the preparation of the first session of the Global Platform comprised government members from the ISDR Support Group plus some agencies, namely China, Argentina, Egypt, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Japan, Mexico, Norway, Russian Federation, South Africa, Switzerland, IFRC, OCHA, UNDP, World Bank and WMO.

The session workshops were organized and supported as follows:

1. National coordination mechanisms - national platforms for disaster risk reduction. Workshop organized by the ISDR national platforms.
2. Policy and legislative systems for disaster risk reduction. Workshop organized by the United Nations Development Programme, Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (UNDP/BCPR).
3. Mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction into national development instruments. Workshop organized by the World Bank's Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (WB/GFDRR).
4. From national frameworks to local action: Implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA). Workshop organized by the ProVention Consortium.
5. Education for disaster risk reduction and safer schools in communities at risk. Workshop organized by the ISDR Thematic Platform for Knowledge and Education.
6. Reducing risk in health facilities and the health sector. Workshop organized by the World Health Organization (WHO).
7. Strengthening disaster risk reduction through preparedness. Workshop organized by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).
8. Ecosystems and environmental management for risk reduction. Workshop organized by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Conservation Union (IUCN).

This first session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction was organized as part of the ISDR secretariat Biennial Work Plan 2006-2007, which in 2007 is supported by contributions to the United Nations Trust Fund for Disaster Reduction from the following governments: Australia, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Germany, India, Japan, Luxembourg, Norway, Philippines, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; and from the European Commission, and the World Bank through the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery.

Special mention is made of the Governments of Norway, Sweden, Denmark and France, who made specific contributions to sponsor the participation of delegates of governments from least developed countries and small island developing states, and to the Government of Switzerland, who made the International Conference Centre Geneva available for the meeting and provided support for the high level dialogue and other elements of the session. The contributions made by participating governments to enable their officials to attend the session and contribute to the workshops and other activities are also greatly appreciated.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge and express my personal gratitude for the commitment and positive spirit of secretariat staff from regional and headquarters units throughout the preparations and conduct of the session. It was truly a team effort. Particular credit goes to the core organizing team led by R. Glenn Mittermann and including Lars Bernd, Vanessa Buchot, Michele Cocchiglia, John Harding, Carolin Schaerpf, Anu Kittila and Beverley Coult. Helena Molin-Valdes, Deputy Director of the secretariat, provided valuable leadership while Christine Alessi, Reid Basher, Craig Duncan, Feng Min Kan and Andrew Maskrey supported in substantive areas of work, media, reporting and administration for the session.