

Aqaba Declaration on Disaster Risk Reduction in Cities

Aqaba, JORDAN

21 March, 2013

We, Mayors and Local Government representatives together with National Government Officials,

Having participated in *The First Arab Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction*, 19-21 March in Aqaba, Jordan, and

Welcoming the support by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the League of Arab States, the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC), and the hospitality of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA), which facilitated the mobilization of Arab mayors, local and national authorities.

We emphasize the importance of reducing disaster risk in Arab cities and declare from Aqaba the following:

Recognizing that:

- Over 56 % of the Arab population at present lives in urban areas (large cities and small towns), while in some countries the percentage of people living in urban areas is as high as 87% of the total population¹;
- The urban population is growing at an accelerated speed of the overall growth in population, while the overall population growth rate is also amongst the highest in the world;
- Arab urban areas are a major source of economic and human development for the opportunities they provide in the form of employment, education, health, communications facilities, trade and tourism;
- A well-conserved environment, supported by viable traditional knowledge and skills, considerably reduces underlying disaster risk factors, strengthens the resilience of communities and saves lives, assets and livelihoods;
- Many Arab cities and towns are located in high risk areas, including coasts and highly seismic zones as well as volcanic areas making them exposed to disaster risks from earthquakes, flooding, flash flooding and storms leading to losses in lives, assets and livelihoods;
- Disaster risk is driven by climate change due to increased frequency and severity of hydro-meteorological incidents including what the Arab region faces from climate change negative impacts manifested in droughts, desertification, flash flooding, and storms leading also to food insecurity. Arab cities and villages are expected to be increasingly exposed to coastal erosion, sea level rise, storms and flash flooding among other climate related risks.
- Sustainable development principles must be closely linked to urban development planning across all sectors (e.g. infrastructure, environment, energy, socio-economic development) to increase resilience to disaster through protection and conservation of natural resources (water, land, green

¹. UNHABITAT, 2012: The State of Arab Cities Report 2012, Challenges of Urban Transition.

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belts, watersheds, swamps) with gender sensitive approach and prioritization of most vulnerable population.

- Strong disaster risk management policies and functional implementing institutions are a must to undertake disaster risk reduction measures.
- Sufficient investments in disaster risk reduction activities are necessary to minimize losses, damages and risks and sustain livelihoods;
- Civil society plays a valuable role in strengthening capacities and enhancing community awareness, hence it is important to engage civil society organizations in planning, implementing, monitoring and assessing disaster risk reduction programmes and actions.

Recalling:

- The World Disaster Reduction Campaign 2010-2015 Making Cities Resilient: "My city is getting ready!" which is aimed at achieving resilient, sustainable urban communities based on the principles of the Hyogo Framework for Action;
- The Mayors' Statement on Resilient Cities at the Third Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, which calls on UNISDR to work with city networks, UN entities and civil society organizations to sustain local preparations for disaster risk reduction and local resilience-building;

Until the end of 2017, we resolve to:

- I. Set up a dedicated local unit for planning and management of disaster risk reduction strategies, including mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery actions at municipality level;
- II. Recommend issuance of legislations and ensure enforcement of laws and regulations with respect to: (a) responsibilities of stakeholders for disaster risk reduction, (b) identification of zones for land-use planning to reduce hazard exposure of city infrastructure, (c) enforcing penalties for non-compliance and providing incentives for compliance to safety standards;
- III. Allocate between 1% and 5 % of city's annual budget for disaster risk reduction works to be spent on integrating risk reduction measures in all development sectors, strengthening institutional capacities, enhancing resilience of infrastructure and improving community preparedness²;
- IV. Prepare at least one risk assessment report of the city (including public buildings, schools, health facilities, historic old towns, and cultural heritage areas) to guide urban development plans and decisions, and ensure that this information and the plans for city's resilience are readily available to the public;

² According to local conditions, such works may include construction and repair of dikes, flood drainage system, maintenance of green belts/forests, public awareness, early warning, training, purchasing rescue and warning equipment, setting-up rescue teams, storage of relief materials, and or provision of micro-credits after disasters for recovery of livelihoods etc.

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- V. Prepare City's Disaster Risk Reduction strategy through consultations with stakeholders to define realistic schemes for risk reduction and link it to national strategy for disaster risk reduction;
- VI. Implement at least one public awareness campaign to increase the understanding of local communities in cities, towns and rural areas about disaster risks and actions they can take to minimize the risks;
- VII. Recommend development of education and training programmes on disaster risk reduction in schools and universities and integration of disaster risk reduction in educational curricula;
- VIII. Build or restore at least two infrastructure facilities to reduce disaster risks; a dike, a dam, or a flood drainage system, where needed;
- IX. Ensure the implementation of disaster mitigation measures in at least two government offices, two schools and two hospitals or health facilities in the city³;
- X. Set-up a system to monitor the enforcement of building regulations and land use planning;
- XI. Setup a municipal early warning committee to prepare and disseminate disaster warning to high risk communities in urban and rural areas⁴;
- XII. Setup local community volunteer groups and train them to support search and rescue, fire fighting, medical aid, and evacuation operations in case of floods and earthquakes, where applicable;
- XIII. Implement at least two schemes to protect natural resources and mitigate disaster risks; e.g. natural drainage channels (canals, rivers), swamps/marsh-lands, mangroves, forests/green belts, watersheds, where needed;
- XIV. Pay special attention to historical sites and world cultural heritage in the Arab region and allocate resources to protect and maintain these sites to reduce disaster risk;
- XV. Strengthen joint cooperation among Arab cities and towns to transfer knowledge and expertise across municipalities and local governments;
- XVI. Announce the 21st of March every year the Arab Day for Disaster Risk Reduction.

³This may include: Purchase insurance for critical buildings and infrastructure (city government offices, bridges, hospitals, schools, airports, train/bus-stations, ports) so as to transfer disaster risks from the public exchequer to the insurance sector, and partner with the insurance sector to promote risk insurance for private sector industry and housing;

⁴This may include: Set-up a multi-disciplinary committee to receive disaster warning information from national and international sources and to disseminate it amongst general public using variety of channels; e.g. media, mosques, churches, community organizations, educational institutions;

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Observations

1. We are committed to this Declaration up to the end of 2017. A review will be conducted in 2015 to ensure consistency with the global disaster risk reduction framework to be adopted in 2015 (post Hyogo Framework for Action).
 2. We acknowledge that Arab countries are at different levels of development with regards to their disaster risk reduction systems and therefore different cities in the Arab states have differential capacities and resources to implement this Declaration. While all share equal commitments to this declaration, there will be differentiated levels of progress among Arab Cities in undertaking targets outlined in the Aqaba Declaration for Disaster Risk Reduction in Cities.
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