

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON GENDER AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

**Closing Remarks By
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and Emergency Relief Coordinator, United Nations**

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here at the closing session of this important conference on Gender and Disaster Risk Reduction. Let me start by expressing my appreciation to the All China Women's Federation for its continued commitment to promoting gender equality inside, and outside, China. I also want to thank the Chinese government for its active role in promoting disaster risk reduction in China, and throughout Asia and more widely. With China's own all too tragic experiences of disasters, and commitment to gender equality, there can be no better place to hold this meeting. My deep appreciation goes to the conference secretariat and all the distinguished experts and participants for your contributions to the success of this event.

As the Supervisor not only of the United Nations Office for Humanitarian Affairs but also of the UN International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction Secretariat, I am honored to have the opportunity to add my voice and support to your commitment to advance gender equality in disaster risk reduction. I don't believe that we can achieve our Millennium Development Goals without addressing these two issues seriously, consistently and sustainably. This means with full political and financial support.

You have gathered here from 45 countries to share your views and your concerns on a number of issues under the theme of gender and disaster risk reduction. Over the last two days, you have collectively underlined the point that the poor, especially poor women, suffer most from the impact of disasters, both because of their greater vulnerability and because they are given less opportunity to address the disaster risks that they live with. As in so many other areas, there is here an unrecognized daily reality for untold numbers of individuals, but also a vast and largely untapped resource of energy, experience and knowledge. It is unforgivable not to make full use of this, or not to do what we must to reduce the impact of disasters on the most vulnerable groups. Because it cannot be repeated too often that it is human action, or lack of it, which creates most disasters, not the natural hazard itself.

You have highlighted that climate change, based on the recent findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), will increase the frequency and intensity of climate-related disasters, such as floods, drought and tropical storms. To build disaster resilience, you also emphasized the importance of gender-balanced policy and community-based disaster risk reduction.

These are profoundly important points in today's world. We cannot make lasting progress in poverty reduction if in some key places, after each step forward, there is then a slip backward every time a disaster strikes. And this is not only what is happening in more and more places, but what is bound to be the case more and more as the effects of climate change make themselves

felt, not least in China. Extreme weather events are increasing in number and intensity. Floods, droughts and cyclones pose ever greater dangers for hundreds of millions of people around the world. Sea-level rise is an existential threat for whole countries and whole regions. And we are only at the beginning of this process, however successful the negotiations are on climate change mitigation at the Copenhagen Conference at the end of the year. It is clearer than ever that the nexus of gender, disaster risk and poverty is a critical place for us to act in the context of climate change.

The Beijing Agenda for International Action on Gender-inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction that you have just adopted not only reflects your collective commitment, but also sets out guidance for practical action by governments and international organizations -- to build gender-effective disaster resilience at the local and national levels.

It is also important that the panels' discussions match so well the agenda of the second session of the Global Platform for disaster risk reduction to be held this June in Geneva, which I look forward to chairing. I will, in this capacity as the Chair of the Global Platform, ensure that the final document from Beijing is shared widely at the Global Platform meeting, encouraging more individuals, institutions and Governments to join the cause of linking disaster risk reduction with climate change and poverty reduction, starting from a fundamental gender perspective.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Disasters pose a great development challenge today more than ever before, because of the dramatic effects of climate change I have already described. Disaster risk reduction offers strategic, yet also practical ways for us to protect lives, properties, livelihoods and socio-economic development. Making disaster risk reduction an integral part of development planning and processes is the most cost-effective way to build the resilience of a country or a community. This is the commitment of the Hyogo Framework for Action which 168 Governments have endorsed and implemented since the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2005. We now need more multi-stakeholder and multi-level collaboration to address these complex issues.

Mainstreaming a gender perspective into disaster risk reduction will not only make more institutions more gender aware and gender sensitive, but will also engage more people in disaster risk reduction. Linking disaster risk reduction with poverty reduction not only helps protect the investment and gains in poverty reduction, but also reduces the impact of disasters on the poor. Making disaster risk reduction a tool for climate change adaptation will enable countries and communities to take immediate actions to reduce the impact of climate disasters. This will be cost effective, as countries can build on the existing knowledge and capacity of disaster risk reduction for building resilience to climate disasters. This must be part of a wider movement towards putting more emphasis on disaster prevention, risk reduction and preparedness, and less on response after the disaster happens; and more emphasis on national and regional capacity building and less on international capacity. These are win-win approaches to addressing these cross-cutting issues. But talk is never enough. We need action. And we need it rapidly and globally.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, let me reiterate my own personal commitment, not least as the father of three daughters and a saddened observer of the effect of disasters on the most vulnerable members of society, to mainstreaming gender perspectives in disaster risk reduction. I look forward to hearing of your successes in advocating and implementing the *Beijing Agenda for International Action on Gender-inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction*. And I look forward above all to a time when women are no longer the main victims of disasters, but the principal movers in saving lives and livelihoods when disaster strikes.

Thank you very much. *Xie Xie*