



Strasbourg, 11 March 2015

AP/CAT (2015) 02
Or. E.

***UNITED NATIONS THIRD WORLD CONFERENCE ON
DISASTER RISK REDUCTION***

Sendai, Japan, 14-18 March 2015

**Statement by the European and Mediterranean Major
Hazards Agreement, Council of Europe**

At the onset, allow me on behalf of the Council of Europe to thank the Government of Japan for hosting this important Conference, for its contribution to the overall process and let me add our admiration for the excellent organization here in Sendai, just after the fourth anniversary of the devastating Tōhoku tsunami that severely hit the region.

“Disaster Risk Reduction” has been on the political agenda of the Council of Europe since 1987 through the work of a quite unique structure (combining intergovernmental action and scientific and technical work) for regional cooperation between the countries of the European and the Mediterranean areas: the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA).

To date, 26 States and several international organizations (such as ISDR, UNESCO and EU) participate in the Agreement’s effort to ensure better risk management of major natural or technological hazards through a dynamic institutional policy making and scientific mechanism for a holistic disaster management strategy with special focus on prevention, mitigation and preparedness.

Since 1987, 12 Ministerial Conferences have taken place. During the 11th Ministerial meeting held in Morocco in 2006, the ministers stressed the importance of risk prevention policy in achieving more resilient societies and fully acknowledged the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-15 as a common guideline for coordinated regional action.

The Ministers, at their 12th meeting in 2010 held in Saint Petersburg, stressed in particular that:

“promoting that disaster risk reduction – including prevention, preparedness and efficient response to emergencies – becomes a political priority at all levels of government and that international negotiations recognise the need to prepare societies to the challenges of increased risk from climate change and other phenomena”. Significant European and Mediterranean Programmes have thus been implemented since 2005 through the Executive Secretariat initiatives and the activities of the network of 26 specialised centres in innovative areas such as:

- Proposal of Ethical principles on disaster risk reduction and people’s resilience to avoid that any disaster risk reduction action can put at stake the main human rights’ principles
- Promotion of the ecosystem-based approach to disaster risk reduction as possible natural infrastructural measures complementing more traditionally adopted engineering measures

- Development of general guidelines and a more practical toolkit to effectively involve persons with disabilities in disaster risk reduction and better address their specific needs
- Awareness raising of younger generations through the Besafenet initiative (addressed to school level students and teachers) and various specialized courses and seminars for university level students.

As stated in the recent resolution of its Committee of Permanent Correspondents, the Agreement will do its utmost to facilitate implementation at regional level of the conclusions of the present Conference, both through its own activities and through a strengthened synergy with the other participants to the European Forum on Disaster Risk Reduction.

To give practical impetus, it will:

- Place emphasis, in the Agreement's future programmes, on the challenges inherited from the previous Hyogo Framework for Action, as well as those newly identified in the Post 2015 Framework, such as climate change impact and special attention to most vulnerable groups
- Examine how the Agreement's network of 26 specialised centres could develop and share its scientific expertise and research so as to contribute to the success of the policies both at international and national levels in terms of prevention, intervention and recovery
- Contribute extensively, through strengthened cooperation with other international organizations and national authorities, to the definition and implementation of a future common European roadmap along the lines set up by the Post 2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

In view of the greater frequency and strength of risks as well as the emergence of new threats, the Council of Europe is more than ever concerned by the serious disruptive effect of disasters on our contemporary societies. This is why the Council of Europe - whose main mission is to promote and protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law - will spare no efforts to offer its support, in particular through its European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA), to achieve the goals defined in the Post 2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.