

**STATEMENT AT THE OPENING OF THE FIRST SESSION OF THE
GLOBAL PLATFORM FOR DISASTER REDUCTION**

by

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Mr Chairman,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Participants,

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and my own, it is a privilege to address you on the occasion of the first session of the Global Platform for Disaster Reduction. During the present session we shall be discussing effective ways to reduce the risks associated with disasters, at the local to international levels.

Every year disasters produce considerable impacts on life, livelihood and property, retarding socio-economic development by years, if not decades, particularly in the developing countries, which are the most vulnerable. Between 1980 and 2005, nearly 7500 natural disasters worldwide have taken the lives of over 2 million people and produced economic losses over 1.2 million million US dollars. Recent statistics from the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters reveal that, of this total, some 90 per cent of the natural disasters, 72.5 per cent of casualties and 75 per cent of economic losses were caused by weather-, climate- or water-related hazards such as droughts, floods, windstorms, tropical cyclones and storm surges, extreme temperatures, land slides, wild fires or by health epidemics and insect infestations directly linked to the meteorological and hydrological conditions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the years, WMO has been promoting the importance of prevention and preparedness measures, including sectoral planning, risk management, early warning systems and emergency preparedness, to reduce the impacts of weather-, climate- and water- related hazards. Through the coordinated networks of the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) of its 188 Members, WMO supports the

provision of a wide range of products and services based on observations, monitoring, hazard analysis, forecasting and warnings. On the global scale, it is significant to note that while the number of these disasters and the associated economic losses have increased steadily from the 1950's to 2005, the reported loss of life has decreased by a factor of 10, demonstrating that early warnings combined with emergency preparedness and response planning can indeed significantly contribute to saving lives.

The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 (HFA) has provided an excellent structure for cooperation at all levels. WMO has adopted it for its cooperation activities with the ISDR system and other partners, to ensure that operational meteorological, hydrological and climate services will be further strengthened and integrated within the disaster risk reduction decision processes in all countries, particularly in those with least resources.

Indeed, numerous capacity-related issues still remain to be adequately addressed and in many countries, further investments are needed to modernize the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs), to ensure they can fully assume their roles and responsibilities, as contemplated within their national disaster risk reduction plans.

Strengthened regional cooperation is also a critical part of the solution to make accessible the latest hazard analysis and forecasting information to countries with fewest resources. In all regions, WMO has promoted strong regional cooperation among its Members in terms of meteorological, hydrological and climate services. WMO facilitates information and capacity building through its Regional Training Centres, Drought Monitoring Centres and 6 Regional Tropical Cyclone Specialized Centres, as well as other Specialized Meteorological Centres.

In May 2007, the Fifteenth World Meteorological Congress endorsed disaster risk reduction as WMO's highest priority and sanctioned the WMO Disaster Risk Reduction Action Plan, aimed at further reducing the loss of lives, livelihoods and property in relation to weather-, water- and climate-related hazards around the world. The Congress strongly endorsed its strategic priorities founded on the basis of HFA priority actions falling directly under the mandate of WMO.

The WMO Disaster Risk Reduction Action Plan is now focusing upon:

- Modernizing the NMHSs as required;
- Strengthening operational early warning systems within a multi-hazard approach;
- Developing capacities for hazard analysis and risk assessment;
- Strengthening cooperation of NMHSs with civil protection and disaster risk management agencies;

- Enhancing public awareness about hydro-meteorological hazards; and,
- Planning for the sustainability of these capacities over time.

Several national and regional projects have been initiated in nearly 30 countries of Africa, South-Eastern Europe, Asia, and Central America, and other initiatives are already underway to achieve it. WMO is committed to working actively with all partner organizations such as the World Bank, UNDP, UNESCO and its IOC, WHO and FAO. Additionally, WMO is establishing a number of new bilateral and multi-lateral partnerships.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In closing WMO's message to the Global Platform for Disaster Reduction, I wish to thank you for your presence, which is a true testimony of your deep commitment to disaster risk reduction activities. Together we are working for a safer world.

Thank you.