

GLOBAL PLATFORM FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

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Swedish statement presented by the Director-General for International Development Cooperation, Mr Jan Knutsson, Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all I would like to thank the ISDR-Secretariat, which has organised this important Global Platform meeting with the crucial support of the Government of Switzerland,.

More than two years have passed since the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in the city of Kobe, in Japan. The time has come to assess how policy commitments have been implemented, and to agree on ways to further promote and support the implementation of the disaster risk reduction agenda.

Two years ago the world was shocked by the effects of the tsunami in the Indian Ocean. At the same time, Sweden was hit by a severe storm. These natural disasters are not comparable in scope and size. Nevertheless, for the individuals affected the consequences were serious. By saying that, I want to stress that the issue of disaster risk reduction concerns all of us, although we might suffer from different kinds of disasters.

In order to move the agenda of risk reduction forward, the challenge is to link risk reduction, development and climate change. These three issues are strongly interconnected and must be treated in a coordinated manner as part of sustainable development.

Disasters are global phenomena; however it is the poorest parts of the world that are hit disproportionately hard by the effects of disasters. Vulnerability is linked to broader social issues, such as poverty, but also social exclusion, conflict and marginalisation. Poverty itself increases people's vulnerability to floods, erosion and hurricanes, for example. The occurrence of disasters is, in turn, a major contributing cause of the drastic increase in poverty. Breaking this vicious circle and reducing environmental degradation, while at the

same time strengthening the ability of vulnerable people to protect themselves and recover quickly after disasters, are key factors in poverty reduction. Disaster risk reduction measures, and increasing risk awareness, are of vital importance for achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Climate change poses a real disaster threat. Environmental degradation is likely to exacerbate the impact of natural hazards, and climate change may lead to more severe and more frequent climate-related disasters in the future. Poor countries, again, are likely to suffer the worst effects of climate change.

Risk reduction perspectives must be integrated into all parts of sustainable development, physical planning and recovery. The climate change dimension should be an integral part of this work.

In Sweden, one important step has been taken in this direction. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida, has developed a policy paper aimed at integrating a risk reduction component into all relevant parts of Swedish development cooperation, as well as increasing direct support to disaster preparedness and risk reduction. The implementation of the policy has already started and will contribute to more risk-sensitive Swedish development cooperation.

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Another important theme of this meeting is the urban environment. Urban areas are experiencing unprecedented growth and will continue to do so in the future. Rapid and unplanned urbanisation, and inadequately built infrastructure, are exposing more people to hazards in cities. Poor people in particular are forced to live in disaster-prone areas such as unstable hill sides or flood risk areas. We must work to reduce vulnerability and improve resilience to natural and man-made disasters.

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Disaster risk reduction is primarily a national responsibility. National platforms are being established all over the world. The Swedish Government has commissioned the Swedish

Rescue Services Agency to coordinate our national platform, work that now is well in progress. Another major contribution to disaster risk reduction in Sweden is the work of the Government Commission on Climate Change and Vulnerability, which will present its conclusions later this year on the consequences of climate change on infrastructure, public health and biodiversity.

Hazards know no national borders. International cooperation is essential. It is time to translate political commitments and policies into global, regional and national action. That requires reinforced efforts by the international community to address disaster risk reduction and to mainstream it into poverty reduction strategies and development cooperation at all levels. Such mainstreaming is crucial for donors, but of equal importance for the UN-system at all levels.

In this context, a stronger ISDR has a crucial role to play in coordination, support and monitoring, and by being the international force that moves the Hyogo Framework for Action forward. One important aspect is to find ways to make the value added by disaster risk reduction activities more visible, to further promote good examples and to make the benefits of investing in disaster risk reduction clearer. Let us all support ISDR in these efforts.

It is of fundamental importance for the future that we share expertise and knowledge about how best to prevent, mitigate and deal with different types of disasters and their devastating effects. We are all vulnerable. Let's make this meeting a success.

Thank you.