



**Statement by the Italian Delegation to the first session
of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction
(Geneva, 5-7 June 2007)**

(extended version)

The theme of disaster risk reduction has been playing an increasingly central role on the international political agenda. The world's population growth and the resulting greater impact of natural disasters clearly shows that no country today could claim to be unaffected by the consequences of natural hazards, i.e. a high occurrence of loss of lives and serious economic damage. The lessons learnt from several recent disasters suggests that appropriate solutions be found for the future. Improved technology, progress in research, as well as the enhancement of technical, legal, organizational and procedural tools available might help us meet this challenge.

We are aware that we can intervene in an effective manner, at different levels and following different operational patterns, with a view to preventing disasters and minimizing their potential effects in the very short, medium and long term.

The "Hyogo Framework for Action" has shown the way forward and defined substantial priorities for countries having subscribed to it, through a common strategy everybody can contribute to thanks to their own experiences and skills. The meetings scheduled over the next few days are of the utmost importance in so far as they will allow us to exchange knowledge, information and good practice and envisage sharing tools and planning and operational mechanisms. All partners will have to work hard to achieve common development policies and find new solutions that go beyond cooperation practices that have, in the past, proved to be inefficient and ineffective. We have to ensure that the "Hyogo Framework for Action", and in particular the 10-year plan, does not just remain merely an interesting reference document but also becomes a concrete

sharing and information process. The objectives identified in Japan are indeed ambitious, but we have to make sure that they are fully implemented. Owing to the Italian territory being constantly threatened by some of the main natural hazards (earthquakes, landslides, flooding, volcanos, tsunamis, forest fires), we had to learn how best to cope with and manage these challenges.

A country like Italy where the incidence of calamitous events in connection with natural disaster risks is very high, with a record of hundreds of thousands of casualties in the past century, owing to seismic activity, floods and landslides, could not but equip itself with the necessary legislative and organizational tools.

The efficiency of the National Civil Protection Service lies in the coordinated action performed by all its national components : local authorities, technical and scientific experts and operational entities are mobilised in the event of an emergency and coordinated according to specific degrees of responsibility. In this context the cognitive element is crucial. On the one hand, detailed territorial and environmental knowledge allows for the “representation” in real time of potential hazard-related scenarios the population may be exposed to, thus making rapid action-planning and decision-making possible. On the other hand, the dissemination to the population of knowledge relevant to civil protection issues is equally important, notably through the realisation of information campaigns targeting people of school-going age. Based on this complex and sometimes difficult though cohesive evaluation and disaster risk reduction process, it has been possible to lay the foundation of a national platform respectful of the terms of reference set out in the “Hyogo Framework”. There is also a strong need to pursue with clarity and coherence the matter of distinction/link between actions that are peculiar to the activity carried out by civil protection and those pertaining to sustainable development, protection and the rational use of the environment. In Europe these two elements find a “common vector” in the context of the development and promotion of the GMES (“Global Monitoring for Environment and Security”) core services, whose planning, monitoring and surveillance mechanisms in relation to possible scenarios, risks and effects are dealt with in a collaborative approach, going

from the very short to the medium and long term. In the same spirit and remaining in a European context, the Community Action Programme in the field of Civil Protection is also making an important contribution by facilitating dialogue between the European actors involved and by promoting the establishment of a community approach. No effort should be spared and no barriers should prevent partners from sharing their respective experiences and skills.

Based on lessons learnt and in response to Italy's, international responsibilities, institutional and political initiatives have been undertaken over the past few weeks to launch a "National Platform for Disaster Reduction". The Italian Civil Protection Department has been developed into a national focal point with a direct link with the President of the Council of Ministers, an institutional mandate for disaster risk monitoring and prevention and with responsibility for national alerts and the management of national emergencies. In addition, it has been accorded a privileged co-ordination responsibility.

The Department of Civil Protection has agreed with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the next steps to be taken in order to define the structure, goals and functioning mechanisms of the Platform, which is due to meet for the first time in July 2007, with participation from all national actors. The Platform's structure is being developed by identifying additional co-actors, taking into account competencies, the capability to interact and the presence, at the national level, of stakeholders with governmental responsibilities in terms of management and implementation of activities focussed on disaster risk prevention.

Private sector stakeholders, such as representatives of insurance companies and of the industrial community, will also be involved. The Platform's main task will be to identify short-medium and long-term strategies aimed at averting, reducing and mitigating risks. The short-term agenda will include development-related activities as well as activities carried out in connection with the use of different types of monitoring networks and of early warning models/tools. The medium/long-run agenda will include infrastructural and urban environmental management together with complex planning activities and information-sharing as well as education projects.

The close link between emergency disaster planning and urban environmental planning might also be of added value, not least through the involvement of local administrations.

We are very grateful to the ISDR, notably to its Director, Salvano Briceño, for having supported us in this exercise, including through its recent visit to Rome. We are confident that we can avail ourselves of his experience in the near future. On our side, we have outlined an action plan, coordinated by the National Platform, with the following objectives :

- regular identification and assessment of the evolution of different scenarios related to complex and often uncontrollable urban development and growth;
- close co-operation with technical and scientific communities, with a view to proposing and producing increasingly reliable and effective monitoring tools, including simulation of risk scenarios and facilitating the use and transfer of new technologies, such as those arising from satellite coverage. Such an approach will allow for the improvement of an already satisfactory national programme;
- the promotion of awareness of risks among the population, the media, administrations and the political world;
- identifying, within the Platform, a strategic coordination framework, notably with regional cooperation and agreements aimed at risk and damage reduction, as well as planning and programming modules, bearing in mind the urban and environmental components.

The functioning mechanisms governing the Platform are intended to foster partnership among the actors involved, inter alia, through training workshops. The outcome of its work is expected to be translated into the submission and approval of coordination plans for all stakeholders, as well as the identification of prioritised actions and sustainable actions compatible with the country's economic and legal background. This is, as I have already pointed out, in line with the common objectives and shared views outlined in the "Hyogo Framework for Action".

The Platform's actions should benefit from mixed public/private funding, in the context of which the support from the private sector will be essential, provided it is matched by a

strategy based on the mutual consensus of all the actors concerned.

In conclusion, in the past the Italian system has often proved to be efficient. A whole series of legal instruments and regulations have been designed as the basis for a legal framework governing actions aimed at mitigating risks. The development and use of new technologies to assess the territorial set up and monitor risks in real time has allowed the prevention of possible disasters and substantially reduced the consequences of same.

Expert training and an effective information system, targeting the population, have become the pillars of our early warning and disaster reduction system.

Much can still be done and the establishment of the Platform will no doubt be an extra incentive to reach the objectives relevant to risk reduction, in line with what Italy has subscribed to in the “Hyogo Declaration”. The joint action carried out by the competent Italian institutions in close cooperation with the ISDR, will therefore enable us to fully reach the goal of effective disaster risk prevention and mitigation, thus allowing to rely on Italy as a “global platform” partner.

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