

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,  
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION  
UNESCO

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At the First Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction

Geneva, Switzerland, 5 June 2007

Ladies and gentlemen,

The implementation of the Hyogo Framework of Action is an imperative in pursuing the substantial reduction of disaster losses. UNESCO welcomes the First Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction which is a timely occasion to review the progress being made by countries and organizations to implement the Hyogo Framework. The session is an opportunity to share best practices and lessons learned for supporting and facilitating disaster reduction, and identify gaps and challenges. We are here today to help raise the level of action to address these challenges. The shape of the challenge is clear: international aid for, and investment in disaster risk reduction have not matched the commitment made in Kobe, Hyogo, at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction. There are worrying trends that point to a lack or insufficient support to disaster risk reduction efforts despite an obvious recognition by decision-makers of the increasing vulnerability to natural hazards. Investing in the right things involves clear priorities. Disaster risk reduction is one of them.

UNESCO hopes that the Global Platform will act as a stimulus to governments and to private groups and individuals to undertake improvements in risk management and disaster reduction activities. Much creative thinking and action have been undertaken recently in this domain that would not have occurred without the momentum created by the Hyogo Framework. In order to pursue such elements and meet the challenge of reducing vulnerabilities, we must establish new partnerships which draw together stakeholders from all levels of society, across different regions, sectors and disciplines. Governments, academic and scientific communities, NGOs, international organizations, local communities and the media are essential players in promoting safety measures: the concerted effort of all these stakeholders will be essential to the birth of a culture of disaster resilience.

UNESCO, bringing together as it does the natural sciences, education, culture, communication, information and the social and human sciences, has an important contribution to make to the development of a "culture of prevention". The Executive Board of UNESCO has just retained "Disaster mitigation and preparedness" among the dozen strategic overarching objectives of the Organization's Medium-Term Strategy for the period 2008-2013. UNESCO is currently engaged in a number of large scale initiatives. Through its Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, the Organization has coordinated the establishment of a regional tsunami warning system in the Indian Ocean. It is committed to helping all countries in the world's danger zones to building their national warning systems as part of the global tsunami and other ocean-related hazards warning system. Real progress has been achieved in the Indian Ocean and work is well underway on warning systems for the North Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean Region and the Caribbean, and the upgrading of the system in the Pacific. Similarly UNESCO is promoting the International Flood Initiative and the International Consortium on Landslides.

Education and knowledge provide people with tools for vulnerability reduction and life-improving self-help strategies. Disaster reduction initiatives should be rooted in schools and in educational programmes but also in social community programmes and activities. That way they can provide basic knowledge, formal and informal education to apply this knowledge into practice. A year ago, UNESCO has had the privilege of hosting in its Headquarters the launching by the ISDR Secretariat and an alliance of stakeholders concerned with disaster education, of a world campaign on education for disaster reduction. Much more recently, UNESCO has engaged in the promotion of an initiative stimulated by the ISDR Secretariat to put in place a science mechanism in support of the ISDR objectives. This initiative represents a

new undertaking which illustrates the excellent cooperation between UNESCO and the ISDR Secretariat as well as other United Nations entities and programmes.

I would like to conclude by saying that while UNESCO is not a donor, we are committed to promoting innovative ways of mobilizing resources and engagement at the service of the Global Platform, to inspiring, bringing together, acting as a catalyst of activities in which respective energies can join forces, as well as encourage the crystallization of key ideas for disaster risk reduction.