



**World Health
Organization**

**WHO STATEMENT TO THE
GLOBAL PLATFORM FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION**

Mr Chairman, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction on behalf of the World Health Organization.

The tragic impact of emergencies and disasters on people's health -as reflected in the reported figures and statistics- is a major imperative for action on disaster risk reduction. However, the available statistics often hide the great personal pain and suffering from the effects of disasters, such as injuries, disease, long-term disabilities and the emotional anguish from loss of loved ones and haunting memories of traumatic events.

This is a huge burden for individuals, families, communities and society to bear.

The fact that millions have also survived is a tribute to their resilience, courage and to the support of communities, health workers and all partners who have helped to reduce risk and respond to these events.

For the sake of people's health we need to emphasize prevention. It may be possible to build back better, but it is not possible to replace lost lives and long-lasting health impacts.

In Latin America and the Caribbean and parts of Asia, we have seen that the health sector has been a leader by initiating the development of multi-sectoral approaches to disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness.

WHO is encouraged by the greater attention given by the health sector to action on emergency preparedness, however, much more needs to be done from the community level to the global level.

The 2008-2009 World Disaster Reduction Campaign for on Hospitals Safe from Disasters has provided the opportunity to focus on the protection of health facilities, health workers and patients from disasters and to ensure that health services can be provided when they are most needed in emergency settings.

A health facility is an excellent example of the need for health and non-health sectors to work closely together. A facility will only be safe when planners, engineers, educators, government policy makers, doctors, nurses and hospital managers work together to ensure that it is both structurally and functionally safe.

The theme of this year's platform is Invest Today for A Safer Tomorrow.

We have most of the know-how to make a safer tomorrow, but we also need the political commitment at the highest level and the necessary investment.

WHO supports calls for mechanisms to enhance political commitment and to provide a more consistent and predictable level of funding for national and community risk reduction initiatives and programmes.

One proposal is the inclusion of an agreed percentage of humanitarian response funding, of the order of 10-20 percent, to be allocated for emergency preparedness and capacity building programmes. One major donor has already taken the lead in this direction.

Today we face enormous challenges from natural hazards, conflicts, food crises, climate change, disease outbreaks and now pandemic influenza.

We need to look for common ways to deal with these risks, particularly by reducing vulnerabilities and building capacities. By working together, we can prepare countries and communities to mitigate and respond to all emergencies which they face, including the current and evolving situation of pandemic influenza.

WHO will strengthen its support for national and community risk reduction and emergency preparedness through risk assessment, policy and programme development, training, hospital safety, research and partnership at global, regional and country levels.

One important way to achieve this goal is our joint support for the establishment of a thematic platform for health risk reduction as a means of better integration of health and disaster risk reduction.

Our partnership is vital not only to the work of the health sector, but more importantly to ensuring that together we can achieve better health outcomes for people at risk of emergencies and disasters.

WHO can assure you that your actions on disaster reduction do make a difference to the health of people at risk of emergencies and disasters and other crises.

16 June 2009, Geneva