

(H.E. Mr. Norihiro Okuda, Deputy Permanent Representative of Japan)
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RESILIENT CITIES: Disaster Risk Reduction in an Urbanizing World
Progress made in the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action

Opening Remarks by H.E. Mr. Norihiro Okuda

Excellencies and Colleagues, Good Afternoon.

I would like to welcome all of you to this side event organized jointly by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), UN-Habitat and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and co-sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Japan and the Republic of Indonesia. I am particularly pleased to co-host this event together with H.E. Mr. Ade Petranto, Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Republic of Indonesia and Ms. Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction and implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA).

We are here today to discuss the issue of resilient cities and how to reduce the risk that disasters pose in an increasingly urbanizing world. Cities are engines for development, prosperity, innovation and hope, and it is for this reason that they will soon be home to two thirds of the global population, as well as generators of much of the wealth and tax income the world produces. But they are also home to one billion poor people living in informal settlements where they are often at high risk of exposure to natural hazards. The impact of disasters caused by climate change and geological events is increasing — not necessarily because disasters are occurring more frequently, but because unplanned urbanization, failing infrastructure, environmental degradation and weak urban or local governance make it difficult to address systemic problems of vulnerability, inequality and exposure to risks. That is to say, human security not only of the poor people, but also of all town dwellers, is at stake.

Climate change will exacerbate many extreme events — floods, storms, droughts, and environmental degradation. In fact, as we know, more than 90 percent of the impact disasters have in urban areas is due to climate-related extreme events. Frequent and costly examples of this impact are the daily and weekly landslides that occur in some parts of the world, due to an over-abundance of rain and construction on unsafe land. Such avoidable damage is a problem that in many cases can be prevented at little cost if action is taken at an early stage.

The recent earthquakes in Haiti, Chile and China are stark reminders of the increased risk of human and economic loss that urban centers face as populations rise. As a result of the collapse of the fundamental infrastructure caused by an earthquake, rescue activities are delayed and early recovery hampered. It is therefore essential for

us to take measures against likely seismic activity, for example, by ensuring that building standards are adequate and that they are enforced, especially since many of the world's biggest and fastest-growing cities are located on or in close proximity to earthquake fault lines.

As one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world, Japan has experienced every type of natural calamity, and has centuries of experience addressing them. On the basis of that experience and knowledge and the technology we have developed in response, we are determined to promote international cooperation in this area. Thus, for example, we contributed to the formulation of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) and development of the Tsunami Warning System. The Government of Japan will co-organize with ISDR, ASEAN+3 International Conference on Disaster Management from August 30th to September 1st in Tokyo. The conference aims at deepening regional cooperation on disaster management in cities and communities and contributing to the Mid-term Review of the Hyogo Framework for Action.

The experience of many countries has shown that implementation of disaster risk reduction measures as part of a development program can produce long-term benefits. Losses and reconstruction are avoided, as is the up-ending of people's lives and their ability to earn their livelihoods; communities become more resilient; and ecosystems are better protected and become more productive. Many cities are now making progress in implementing the Hyogo Framework for Action, and we will hear more on this subject from our distinguished panelists shortly.

While focusing today on the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action, we should be mindful of the importance of disaster risk reduction within the broader development agenda. There is no question that significant progress has been made over the past five years in mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into development sectors, particularly in sectors such as health and education, but much remains to be done. In international cooperation centring on the Hyogo Framework for Action, it is also necessary to consider taking measures against climate-related disasters and to raise awareness of the new challenge of adaptation to climate change.

Reducing the risk of disasters is a long-term effort, and I would like to encourage all of you to reflect on how we can strengthen our agenda in this area for the next 5 years and beyond. The Hyogo Framework for Action is a time-bound framework and we need to begin to develop a vision of what should be addressed after the year 2015.

It is, therefore, with great interest that I will be listening to the discussion today on disaster risk reduction in an urbanized world.

Thank you for your attention.

