



United Nations  
International Strategy for Disaster Reduction

**Statement by Margareta Wahlström  
Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction  
United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction**

**UN MILLENNIUM GOALS SUMMIT, NEW YORK  
ROUNDTABLE 6: Widening and strengthening partnerships  
Wednesday, 22 September 2010, 2-5 pm**

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to join you this afternoon to discuss how widening and strengthening partnerships can help achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The key message that I would like to convey today is that if we do not ensure that development investments are risk-sensitive - so that natural hazards, such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes or tsunamis, do not turn into major disasters, - we will not have done what we already know is required for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. This can be done in a sustainable manner, only through partnerships among national and local Governments, financial institutions, NGOs, private sector and academia.

Disaster risk is increasing globally and is highly concentrated in middle- and low-income countries. Countries with small and vulnerable economies -- especially many small island developing states and least developed countries -- experience relatively higher levels of economic loss from disasters than developed countries. The numerous disasters that we have witnessed during this year, from the earthquakes in Haiti and Chile to the floods in Pakistan, are only the tip of the iceberg. Each time a disaster strikes somewhere in the world, we act surprised. Nature is often blamed. Rarely do we think about the connection between our own actions and the very real vulnerability and exposure to risk that turn a natural hazard into a major disaster.

For many countries with a risk-sensitive approach to development, such as Japan, Chile and Cuba, earthquakes and hurricanes do not lead to disaster. One of the poorest countries in the world, Bangladesh, has been able to reduce the impact of cyclones through improved community preparedness, early warning systems and stronger institutional capacity for planning and coordination national action, when compared to forty years ago.

Yet, experts in disaster risk reduction can point to dozens of nations where risk has been allowed to accumulate over long periods. For these countries, it is only a matter of time before a major disaster strikes, with serious human consequences and the loss of decades and future development gains. The 2010 MDG Gap Task Force Report highlighted the urgency to address the issue of disaster risk and recommended increased development assistance to support developing countries vulnerable to natural hazards in adopting disaster risk reduction programmes as part of national development strategies.

Changing current practices require public and private sector leaders to seek opportunities to avoid repeating mistakes that contribute to disasters, beginning with self-directed questions such as: are my cities growing in the right direction and not in an area that will be affected by sea level rise five, fifteen or fifty years from now? Are the hospitals and maternal health care facilities in my country going to be resilient and functional if a hurricane strikes? Is there anything I can do to increase the agricultural productivity of my country, through hazard resistant cropping strategies or improved weather monitoring and early warning systems?

An important question for aid-contributing nations, for example, is: “Are hundreds of thousands of school children going to be safe in the new schools that my government is financing in an earthquake-prone country?”

In 2005, UN Member States crafted the Hyogo Framework for Action, a 10-year action plan that focuses on strategic goals to make communities safer. These include hazard-resistant schools, hospitals and other infrastructure, drought and flood-resistant cropping strategies, and better urban planning that avoid urban development on flood plains, unstable slopes, or other high risk areas. It also includes strengthening early warning systems.

Today, I call on all world leaders, policy makers, CEOs, civil society, international financial institutions and donors to ensure that development investments -- bilateral, domestic or multilateral -- are risk-sensitive. This does not require huge amounts of new resources, but different uses of existing resources. It requires better coordination between all actors. At best it would offer a new strategic direction for the international aid mechanisms. Adopting a risk-sensitive approach to development requires courage and leadership, because the fruits of that labour may take time to ripen. Disaster risk reduction is an astute investment which will help accelerate the achievement of the MDGs.