

**INFORMAL THEMATIC DEBATE OF THE 65TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON DISASTER RISK REDUCTION
Wednesday, 9 February 2011 · New York**

Background

Last year, a total of 950 disasters caused by natural hazards were recorded, nine-tenths of which were weather-related events, such as storms and floods. This total makes 2010 the year with second-highest number of disasters since 1980. The overall losses amounted to around US\$130 billion, of which US\$ 37 billion was insured¹. These events claimed more than 296,000 lives and affected more than 208 million people². In addition to increased exposure of communities to extreme weather events and other natural hazards, the key drivers of disaster risk are poverty, rapid urbanization and the impact of climate change.

Recognizing the importance of reducing vulnerabilities³ and risks to hazards⁴, especially in developing countries whose development gains can be wiped away with a single disaster, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed in 2005 the *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters* to promote systematic integration of disaster risk reduction efforts into policies, plans and programmes for sustainable development and poverty reduction. With the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) providing strategic guidance, national and local governments and other organizations at local, national, regional and international levels have taken measures to reduce underlying risk factors and strengthen disaster preparedness.

It is often assumed that development efforts will also lead to the reduction of disaster risk or strengthened adaptation to climate change. Specific studies on disaster risk and the current trend in disaster impacts demonstrate that this may not always be the case. However, short-sighted and unsustainable development practices may contribute to increasing disaster risk. In addition, spending on measures to reduce risk, by national and local governments, remains insufficiently understood, both in scale and in effectiveness.

As demonstrated by the 7.0 magnitude earthquake that hit Haiti in January 2010, wherein 222,570 people lost their lives (as opposed to Chile's 8.8 magnitude earthquake in February 2010, which caused 562 fatalities, and the 7.1 magnitude earthquake in New Zealand in September 2010, where there were no casualties), poor countries remain at a higher risk of disasters. Inadequate urban planning and infrastructure further undermine vulnerable livelihoods and threaten to reverse progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

¹ Munich Re

² CRED EMDAT database

³ Vulnerability is defined as "the conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes, which increase the susceptibility of a community to the impact of hazards." (UN/ISDR, Geneva 2004)

⁴ Hazard is defined as "a potentially damaging physical event, phenomenon or human activity that may cause the loss of life or injury, property damage, social and economic disruption or environmental degradation." Hazards can include latent conditions that may represent future threats and can have different origins: natural (geological, hydrometeorological and biological) or induced by human processes (environmental degradation and technological hazards). (UN/ISDR, Geneva 2004)

Greater efforts and global partnerships are needed to safeguard the development investments made to reduce poverty and to strengthen countries capacity to cope with disaster impacts.

Objective and Expected Outcomes

The Informal Thematic Debate of the General Assembly on Disaster Risk Reduction aims to strengthen the understanding of how to reduce risk and exposure to disasters through effective investment policies and practices and sustainable urban management. Given the fact that the urban population in developing countries has risen by 77 per cent to nearly 2.6 billion people in the last decade, special focus will be placed on rapidly expanding urban areas, where risk, population and economic assets are concentrated.

Building on the High-level Plenary Meeting of the General Assembly on the MDGs (September 2010, New York), which acknowledged that disaster risk reduction and increasing resilience to natural hazards can accelerate the achievement of the MDGs, the thematic debate will underscore the linkages between disaster risk reduction, poverty eradication and sustainable development. It is envisioned that these discussions and the President's Summary of the thematic debate, complemented by the findings of the HFA's Mid-term Review, will inform the third session of the biennial Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (Geneva, May 2011) and contribute to the substantive definition of priority actions and focus areas for the implementation of the HFA in its remaining four years.

Programme

The thematic debate will take place on Wednesday, 9 February 2011 at UN Headquarters in New York. The debate, which will consist of two moderated panel discussions with high-level experts, will focus on building local resilience in urban areas and promoting investment for disaster risk reduction. The floor will be opened to Delegates and other participants for questions to the panelists, as well as very brief interventions to share their experience and other perspectives.

Panel One: Invest Today for a Safer Tomorrow

Spending on measures to reduce risk remains insufficiently understood in both scale and effectiveness. Given the growing risks of natural hazards and the need to adapt to climate change, there is a pressing need for national and local governments to understand what constitutes effective investment in disaster risk reduction. This panel will discuss disaster risk reduction investments, including issues related to what makes investments effective, what are the investment mechanisms/instruments, and how to stimulate and monitor investments.

Panel Two: Cities at Risk: Addressing the Challenges of Disaster Risk in Urban Settings

Cities today are bigger and growing faster than ever in human history. Well over 50 per cent of the world's population lives in urban areas, and they are increasingly becoming centers for innovation, economic opportunity, growth and entertainment. However, cities may also be high-

risk areas, not only in terms of their very rapid growth and the resulting pressure on infrastructure, but also because some cities are exposed to a wide range of natural hazards. Poorly planned urban environments, weak urban governance, a lack of infrastructure and basic services, and rapid population growth have increased disaster risk in urban areas. Disaster risk has become, and will continue to be, an increasingly urban problem. This panel will look into issues of building resilience of communities to disaster risk in urban settings, both in terms of challenges and solutions.

| Time | Programme |
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| 10 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. | <p><i>Opening Ceremony</i> Opening Remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss, President of the General Assembly • H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General <p>(Venue: Conference Room 3, North Lawn Building, UN Headquarters)</p> |
| 10:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. | <p><i>Interactive Panel Debate 1: Invest Today for a Safer Tomorrow</i> Moderator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Zeinab Badawi, International broadcaster and journalist and presenter of BBC World News and BBC Hardtalk <p>Panel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amb. Toni Frisch, Chair of UNEP/OCHA Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies • Ms. Tioulong Saumura, Member of the Parliament of Cambodia and Vice-President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, Finance and Trade • Dr. Abebe Haile-Gabriel, Director, Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture, African Union Commission • Mr. Rubem Hofliger, General Director, Natural Disaster Fund (FONDEN), Mexico • Mr. Thomas Loster, Munich Re Foundation <p>(Venue: Conference Room 3, North Lawn Building, UN Headquarters)</p> |
| 1 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. | <p><i>High-level Luncheon</i> Hosted by the PGA, by invitation</p> <p><i>Brownbag Lunch Events</i> “Taking Collective Action in DRR for Good Governance - Investing in Our Children’s Future” <i>Organized by the World Vision, Save the Children and UNDP</i> A multi-stakeholder dialogue between youth, NGOs, UN agencies, and Governments on working together to integrate DRR and development, addressing risks which undermine sustainable</p> |

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| | <p>development. (Venue: Conference Room 5, North Lawn Building, UN Headquarters)</p> <p>“Innovations in Disaster Risk Reduction” <i>Organized by the World Bank</i> A discussion on the role and importance of open data and technology across the disaster risk management cycle: from disaster risk assessments, to mapping damage after disasters, to reconstruction. (Venue: Conference Room 7, North Lawn Building, UN Headquarters)</p> |
| 3 p.m. – 5:45 p.m. | <p><i>Interactive Panel Debate 2: Cities at Risk - Addressing the Challenges of Disaster Risk in Urban Settings</i> Moderator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Zeinab Badawi, International broadcaster and journalist and presenter of BBC World News and BBC Hardtalk <p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Joan Clos, Executive Director, UN-Habitat <p>Panel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Kadir Topbas, Mayor of Istanbul, Turkey • Mr. Oscar Ortiz, Mayor of Santa Tecla, El Salvador • Mr. Mawardy Nurdin, Mayor of Banda Aceh, Indonesia • Ms. Mary Jane Ortega, Secretary-General, CITYNET <p>(Venue: Conference Room 3, North Lawn Building, UN Headquarters)</p> |
| 5:45 p.m. – 6 p.m. | <p><i>Closing Ceremony</i> Closing Remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction • H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss, President of the General Assembly <p>(Venue: Conference Room 3, North Lawn Building, UN Headquarters)</p> |