



World Conference on Disaster Reduction
18-22 January 2005, Kobe, Hyogo, Japan

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World Conference on Disaster Reduction Opens in Kobe

Kobe, Hyogo, Japan - - Three weeks after the devastating tsunami in the Indian Ocean, the World Conference on Disaster Reduction opened this morning here to address the critical need of better preparing communities when faced by natural hazards.

In an opening address to the world gathering, Jan Egeland, United Nations Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and Humanitarian Relief Coordinator, urged conference participants to turn commitments into action in order to make societies more resilient when confronted by natural hazards. "All disaster prone countries should adopt clear, goal-oriented disaster reduction policies and actions plans underpinned by dedicated structures and resources", he said.

Addressing an audience of over 4,000 participants from more than 150 countries, he outlined the invaluable role of communication and education in making disaster-resilient societies a reality. "Technology is not a cure-all. From Singapore to South Africa, experience shows us that people, not hardware, must be at the center of any successful disaster warning and preparedness measure." He added "children everywhere should be learning about living more safely with the natural hazards around them, as a part of their basic life skills education." Mr. Egeland also proposed a new funding initiative to meet the global challenge posed by natural hazards recommending that countries earmark a minimum of ten per cent of the billions spent on disaster relief for disaster risk reduction.

At the outset of the world gathering, one minute of silence was observed by conference participants for those who perished in last month's disaster. United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in a video taped message, said "we must draw and act on every lesson we can, and prevent such tragedies from occurring in the future". Also delivering an opening statement was Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi who pledged his Government's support in enhancing regional cooperation and promoting partnerships to help build a global culture of disaster prevention.

His Majesty the Emperor of Japan, referring to Japan's own long-standing expertise in disaster reduction, outlined the need to cross natural boundaries to assist more vulnerable communities in preparing themselves against threats posed by nature. The World Conference, he said, presented "a precious opportunity to share mutual experiences, to protect lives and livelihoods of people from natural disasters, by aiming to strengthen preparedness and to create a society where people can live in safety and security".



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