Your Excellencies (Mayor, Secretary General Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction)
Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues.

First of all, as Head of the National Italian Department of Civil Protection, I would like to thank the UN International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction, the city of Venice and its mayor for the efforts made, once again, in organizing this important meeting, which brings together all active stakeholders involved in Disaster Risk Reduction both at global and local levels. It’s a real pleasure for me to meet you in Venice, an extraordinary setting, indeed, where to discuss the concrete and positive actions aimed at reaching those goals set by the Hyogo Framework for Action.

As we all know, the likelihood of disasters has significantly increased over the last decades, as well as the degree of destruction caused by their effects. This is why the issue of Disaster Risk Reduction is constantly ranking at the top of international political agendas.
Disasters are, however, much more the consequence of vulnerability and lack of resilience than the effect of natural calamities.
In order to face these increasing challenges, the 2010-2011 world disaster reduction campaign "making cities resilient" calls on issues of local governance and urban risk while drawing upon previous ISDR campaigns on safer schools and hospitals, and the sustainable urbanization principles developed in the 2009-2013 UN-HABITAT WORLD URBAN CAMPAIGN.

This seems to be the perfect location to discuss the topic of climate change. Venice, in fact, represents the global symbol par excellence of cultural heritage that is severely endangered by climate change by virtue of its setting amongst sea and land in a lagoon. The floating city, “Queen of the Adriatic”, has resisted during its long history without altering its captivating beauty and fascination over time thanks to the constant development of specific risk prevention and monitoring skills. Venice has received global recognition as a “role model city” thanks to the great efforts to preserve its invaluable cultural heritage.

However, if Venice is a clear example of successful risk prevention plans, we must bear in mind that Italy is one of the richest countries in the world in terms of cultural and artistic heritage at tremendous risk due to massive urbanization, high incidence of a number of different risks and to a full array of natural disasters ranging from earthquakes, volcanoes, floods, landslides to forest fires (…and over the last years also severe snow fall!). The most important cities in the country, as well as the smaller medieval towns are often built near main rivers (Rome, Florence, Turin, Pisa). Like Venice, 46 cities have already joined the “resilience campaign”, and additional ones are already on their way to do so.

The special result achieved in our country was largely determined by a common understanding, not based on the geographic area or the size and importance of cities. In Italy the campaign was joined by cities of the north and the south indiscriminately, from the largest cities to the smallest villages.
Another aspect of Italy which is completely new is the joining together of municipalities, 15 municipalities acting together as a unique body in order to better face risk management by developing a common policy and sharing tools and resources.

Thus, we can say that we gathered a lot of experience and lessons learned which as we all know is not always enough, and a lot more needs to be done.

We are happy to share with you all our findings but we are also ready to learn more by sharing your own experience and lessons learned.

We all know that addressing vulnerability is a very expensive goal, that cannot be achieved unless all public and private resources decide to join their efforts. Improving resilience, on the other hand, requires homogeneous, continuous and structured work which is made of cooperation, information exchange and common action by all the actors involved, whose work is devoted to civil protection purposes.

In Italy this process has already started. Bearing in mind these considerations, in 2008 the Italian prime minister set up the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, and assigned to the National Italian Department of Civil Protection the responsibility of its coordination.

Here “civil protection” is not a task that should be carried out by the Department of Civil Protection but by a system, participated by all the public and private stakeholders, both in terms of knowledge and responsibilities. Central authority is represented along with all the local authorities, the private companies and the citizens all called upon to cooperate in a joint effort to ensure that the system works.

Thus the Italian national platform is closely related to the civil protection service as it was conceived and planned according to the same collaborative and coordinated approach, including the aim to promote a continuous exchange of new trends and best practices within our boundaries and abroad with other foreign regional and national partners.

This approach has been fully recognized and appreciated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which in 2010 published the results of a review of the Italian civil protection, stressing among other aspects:

1. the validity of the Italian model in coordinating emergency management resources, which the civil protection services of different countries have become increasingly aware of;
2. the remarkable achievements in implementing a coherent multi-risk approach to civil protection.

The structure of the Italian platform is based on a strategic, operational and technical cooperation. This is a strong belief of the Italian government and the guiding principle of most initiatives set up in the last two years.

The recent terrible events in Japan have demonstrated that we need to learn more about hazards, their interconnectedness, and their impact on human lives.

If disasters do not recognize political boundaries, then a global knowledge-sharing approach is required.

The GRM initiative should lead to uniform, standardised, internationally agreed upon methodologies and tools for computing and modelling the risks with reference to a large class of natural and man-made hazards.

Focusing on standards, ISDR has developed and promoted the “DESINVENTAR” tool which the Department has appreciated and will work on the further promotion of.
Concerning the HFA & MCR implementation strategy the Department has taken practical steps as per the following:

at national level
• involving national and regional administrations in a permanent dialogue on disaster risk reduction
• coordinating the Italian platform for disaster risk reduction
• promoting cross sectoral programmes, projects and initiatives
• stimulating legislative innovation

at local level
• supporting municipalities, inter-municipal organizations and provinces in developing their own risk knowledge base, forecasting and prevention systems, contingency and emergency plans.
• promoting disaster risk training, education, awareness
• facilitating local campaigns, events, forums

As I have stated earlier this has proved not to be enough yet. That is why we are also working on future steps:

at national level
• steadily involving the political level
• reinforcing policy cooperation among administrations on cross cutting issues
• establishing a platform website and reserved area for exchange of information
• strengthening the involvement of private partners
• promoting cooperation with foreign platforms at local level
• promoting further efforts in the areas of planning and early warning
• further training of mayors and administrators
• facilitating matching between needs and resources
• further reinforcing the role played by volunteers
• promoting twinning projects among cities, including foreign partners

I wish you all a smooth and fruitful working session.