

***Building Cities Resilience to Disasters:
Protecting Cultural Heritage and Adapting to Climate Change***

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Prof. Orsoni, Mayor of Venice, Mr Gabrielli, Head of the Italian Civil Protection, Mr Navarra, Director of the Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Climate Change, Distinguished Representatives of Local Governments and Municipalities, Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

“Sono onorata di essere qui con voi oggi in questa splendida città, Venezia, città di storia, arte e di cultura e da sempre impegnata nella riduzione dei rischi da disastro”.

I am honoured to be here today with you to discuss ways of building Cities’ resilience to disasters, in a context of Climate Change Adaptation and Cultural Heritage Protection. I would like to particularly underline the importance of holding this event in the City of Venice, an extraordinary architectural masterpiece, a UNESCO World Heritage site, a unique artistic achievement, but also a city that has been heavily affected by floods. In this context, preserving Venice’s cultural heritage has always been one of the City political leaders’ main priorities. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the huge integrated efforts made by Italy and its local administrations to defend not only the city Venice, but also its lagoon environment and its living social life, which is part of the city’s culture and heritage. It represents an example for the entire world.

I would also like to congratulate the Venetians for participating directly in disaster risk reduction efforts through an effective Municipal Civil protection. I know for instance of the special group of citizen-volunteers, expressly devoted to the protection of cultural assets in case of an emergency. They are able to intervene fast, together to the other forces

such as the fire brigades, as well as to suggest prevention measures. This is a truly commendable example of citizens' involvement in protecting their cultural heritage.

I am also very pleased to see here today together cities representatives, delegates of regional and international organisations, the scientific and academic community, and the private sector - all the key actors that need to work together to build the resilience of cities to disasters.

What is the situation today?

In any given year, the lives of over 200 million people are disrupted by disaster events. Over the past 40 years the world population has almost doubled to seven billion. During the same period the population living in flood-prone river basins increased 114%, and, along cyclone-prone coast-lines, 195%. 2011 was a new record year in disaster losses world-wide. The reinsurance company Munich Re recorded 380b USD of global economic losses (2/3 higher than in 2005, the previous record). Economic development is putting more people and valuable assets in harm's way. The upcoming IPCC Special Report on "Managing the Risks of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation indicates an increase in risk due to greater frequency of extreme weather events.

Risk is accumulating and disaster losses are rising rapidly in all parts of the world, including Europe. In OECD countries the risk of economic losses is now growing faster than their average GDP growth.

Europe, as a region, is exposed to a wide range of natural hazards such as storms, droughts, heat waves, floods, earthquakes, avalanches and landslides which continuously cause human and economic losses. Europe saw in 2010, for example, the biggest increase in disaster events – plus 18.2 per cent – compared to the decade's averages. The Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction produced in 2011 further indicates that vulnerability to hazards is very high and rapidly increasing in Europe and overall in developed countries, with adverse impacts on their economy.

Cities face increasing challenges.

Over the past 30 years, the world population increased by 87%. Europe has 72 % of the population living in cities. Today 100 cities constitute 30% of the world economy. Cities hold

the greatest economic and human assets and further potential for economic growth are also the most exposed and vulnerable to damage and loss. Cities today are not only major engines of economic opportunity, but also of education and cultural life. Risk management is critical to safety and welfare of citizen and prosperity of economy.

Climate change is bringing new challenges for urban areas and their growing population: in addition to the physical risks linked to an increased incidence of extreme weather events and incidence of high sea levels, cities will have to face challenges related to water management, physical infrastructure, transport, ecosystem goods and services.

The importance of managing the challenges posed by climate variability risk is evident in places like Venice. During these two days we will learn more about the experience matured by in coping with the flood risk during its millenary history.

I would also like to recognise the partnership between the City of Venice and the City of Byblos, in Lebanon, on managing maritime risks, a successful example of a self-initiated city-to-city learning event. The two cities, both UNESCO World Heritage sites, together with the private sector have been sharing experiences, concerns, policy and technical schemes to identify concrete solutions to the challenges faced by Byblos' harbour.

Cities across the world share a common challenge: protecting their cultural heritage from disasters. The loss or deterioration of outstanding cultural heritage properties impacts negatively on international, national and local communities it is a loss of in social, economic and cultural terms, a loss of our and future generations' understanding of humanity history and potential. Protecting cultural heritage is a moral duty and a fundamental goal of disaster risk management and I want to recognize the leading role of Italy.

UNISDR through the campaign *Making Cities Resilient- My city is getting ready!* is committed to support cities and their populations to build a culture of risk awareness and resilience. To date, 385 Cities have joined the Campaign in Europe from which 46 cities are from Italy. Later on this morning 7 Cities will sign the certificate of commitment to the Campaign. They are committing to the "Ten Essentials" for building resilience, which is a series of recommendations and guidance to make cities a safer place to live. The campaign

spans a global network of over a thousand engaged cities, provinces and municipalities of different sizes, characteristics and risk profiles. The campaign provide an opportunity for cities to share their experiences in risk reduction.

As an offspring of this initiative, today we will launch the *Local Government Self-Assessment Tool*. This tool has been developed through a process engaging cities, governments, academia, experts, private sector and other partners from over 25 countries. This instrument can be used as an evaluation and feedback mechanism for local and city governments to establish baselines, identify gaps and have comparable data across local governments, within their country and globally, to measure advancements over time. It will also enhance the reporting against the implementation of the HFA.

The work of cities to manage disaster risk can greatly benefit from the work of National Platforms for Disaster Risk Reduction. National Platforms are key mechanisms for countries' development of sound strategies on disaster risk reduction in line with the principles set in the Hyogo Framework for Action. As multi-stakeholder mechanisms, they have the potential to leverage a **'whole of society' approach** to disaster risk reduction by mobilising existing expertise in government, local administration, academia, private sector and third sector. They are critical to improve national coordination in disaster risk management and reduction, and in disseminating information not only at national but also at local level.

National Platforms can also play a critical role in the protection of cultural heritage. I recently learnt that France, through its National Platform, is in the process of setting up a Working Group on Cultural Heritage and Disaster Risk Reduction, together with the Ministry of Culture. I am sure that a similar approach can be developed by other European National Platforms.

In 2011, UNISDR will support a review of existing national platforms' practices in order distil good practices for the further strengthening of the existing national mechanisms and support countries which are in process of setting them up.

In Europe, the **21 existing** National Platforms cooperate at the regional level through exchanges of practical learning through the **European Forum for Disaster Risk Reduction**

(EFDRR). This forum, meeting yearly, allows exchanges among National Platforms and HFA Focal Points on progress made on building resilience to disasters. The third EFDRR meeting will take place in Croatia in October this year.

Regional initiatives are critical to support the work at national level. The Council of Europe Major Hazards Agreement is instrumental in facilitating exchanges and cooperation on disaster risk reduction between Member States, also through its specialized centres, such as the European University for Cultural Heritage (CUBEC) in Ravello, Italy, which is an important training and research centre for the promotion of cultural heritage.

The EU has also engaged in a number of activities for the prevention of disasters and in 2010 issued a guidance paper on national risk assessment and mapping for disaster management, which was developed together with the national authorities of the Member States. This will be the basis for a “EU Overview of risks” which will be a useful tool for authorities at the national, regional and local level to move forward the Disaster Risk Reduction agenda.

As mentioned earlier, the private sector plays a critical role in the development of national policies and practices for disaster risk reduction. On average, private investments represent 85% of a country’s investments. Companies have a wealth of knowledge and expertise to contribute to disaster risk reduction and at the same time learn a lot from the public and the third sector to strengthen their business practices. Without the full engagement of private and business sectors, resilience and cultural heritage protection cannot be achieved. I am pleased to see you here today. UNISDR is working very closely with the private sector and has helped the formulation by a number of companies, jointly, of Disaster Risk Reduction Five Essentials for Business which were presented at the 2011 Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction last year..

Building on the momentum generated at the last Global Platform, next year Global Platform, to be held in Geneva from 19 to 23 May, will continue to engage the private sector the private sector as a core partner in reinforcing resilience in our communities.

Looking ahead

At a time of increased frequency and intensity of disasters, we must look ahead to prevent losses of livelihoods and wealth such as those of 2011.

Later this year the United Nations Sustainable Development Conference which will take place later this year in Rio de Janeiro, known also as the Rio+20, will take stock of 20 years of work for sustainable development. Disaster risk reduction has been identified as a key challenge and objective for sustainable development and as one of the seven priorities under the 'emerging topics' to be considered at the conference. The outcome of the Rio+20 Summit offers a critical opportunity to ensure that disaster risk reduction and resilience is a key feature in sustainable development and the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

In addition, by 2015 successor arrangements for the Hyogo Framework for Action will have to be developed. The current HFA has substantively contributed to further disaster risk reduction, but the goals and priorities for action are still far from being achieved. Consultations towards the development of a Post-2015 framework on disaster risk reduction are starting and I would like to underline here the essential role that Cities and local Government will play in this process. The consultation sessions will also be linked to existing meetings such as the regional platforms and other major conferences. I invite you all to contribute to it by sharing your experience and lessons learnt.

We will work to contribute towards increasing the momentum and focus on climate and disaster risks as threats to cultural heritage and we shall continue to focus on how to address these challenges. I wish you a productive dialogue over the next two days and a successful meeting.

Thank you.