

SUBMISSION BY THE
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD & TOBAGO ON
PREPARATIONS FOR THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON
NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION

As a small island developing State, Trinidad and Tobago attaches great importance to the efforts being made by IDNDR to reduce the impact of natural disasters on States which, without exception, are vulnerable in varying degrees to the ravages of nature.

No one doubts that small island developing States are among the most vulnerable; in a recent study by the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator, it was shown that at least thirteen (13) of the twenty-five (25) most disaster-prone countries were small island developing States.

Extremely damaging natural disasters in the form of cyclones, hurricanes, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, storm surges, landslides, extended drought and extensive floods are of special concern to small island developing countries because of their small size, narrow resource base and the pervasive impact of such events on their economies, especially in circumstances where there is loss of insurance coverage. For small island developing countries affected by natural disasters, these particular characteristics produce an impact which is qualitatively different in two respects:

- first, the economic, social and environmental consequences tend to be longer lasting;
and
- second, the costs of rehabilitation tend to be significantly higher, as a percentage of gross national product.

It is clear therefore that greater focus must be placed on reducing the impact of natural disasters at the national, regional and international level; it is clear also that IDNDR and the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction must accept the duty to give special recognition to small island developing States so that their particular characteristics will be taken into account in formulating and developing natural disaster reduction programmes.

The Alliance of Small Island Developing States will be concluding its series of technical and preparatory meetings with a global conference to be held in Barbados, ending the first week of May; too late to make a substantial submission to the recently concluded preparatory committee. Nonetheless, it proposes to make detailed submissions to the Secretariat shortly after its meeting in Barbados.

At this point therefore, Trinidad and Tobago and the AOSIS would make the following preliminary suggestions on what should result from the World Conference in Yokohama:

- The final document of the Yokohama Conference should comprise two parts, a Declaration and a Plan of Action. The Plan of Action should focus on activities at the national, regional and international level. With the experience gained at this the midway point of the International Decade for natural disaster reduction, the Plan of Action should seek to address ways and means to ensure that the second half of the Decade succeeds in achieving the goals that have so far eluded it during the first half. The importance of heightening the awareness of all concerned, including the general public and the international community cannot be overstated and should be actively pursued.

In keeping with the generally accepted view that small island States are among the most vulnerable group of States to natural disasters and the least equipped to handle them, the Plan of Action should make provision for:-

- (1) Technical and financial assistance at the national level to enhance disaster preparedness and management mechanisms. It should also address the strengthening of regional facilities to ensure more effective concerted action and to provide support for national efforts.
- (2) At the international level, the Plan of Action must seek to assist small island States in their efforts to foster cooperation among themselves. There is need for the improvement of access to technology and for training. Finally, the results and recommendations of the global Conference for the sustainable development of small islands developing countries to be held in Barbados in April/May must be reflected in the document.