



The International Conference on the Implementation of the  
Health Aspects of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk  
Reduction **2015-2030**

10-11 March 2016

The Royal Orchid Sheraton hotel Bangkok

**Opening Remarks (Draft)**

Mr. Robert Glasser

Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for  
Disaster Risk Reduction

## **Salutations (NOTE THIS MAY CHANGE UP TO LAST MINUTE)**

- Your Excellency Professor Piyasakol Sakolsatayadhorn,  
Minister of Public Health Government of Thailand
- Ms. Pornprapai Ganjanarintr, Director-General,  
Department of International Organizations, Ministry of  
Foreign Affairs of Thailand
- Dr Bruce Aylward, Executive Director a.i. Outbreaks and  
Health Emergencies, World Health Organization (WHO)
- Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,
  
- It is an honour for me, as the Special Representative to  
the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction,  
to welcome you, to the first UN Conference on the  
Implementation of the Health Aspects of the Sendai  
Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030

## **Appreciation**

- I would like to express my appreciation to the Kingdom  
of Thailand for hosting this important forum which will

explore how we should take account of health issues in implementing the Sendai Framework

- I also take the opportunity to thank the World Health Organisation for its participation and support to the organisation of this event. It is the first time we have had such a gathering.
- I am especially pleased to welcome the 300 government representatives, health and disaster risk experts, officials from international organisations and NGOs from all over the world who are present here today.

## **Introduction**

- In March 2015, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 – 2030 was adopted in Japan at the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in 2015. Among its innovations was the

recognition of health as a core area of work for disaster risk reduction.

- The Sendai Framework aims to achieve a substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health. It is fully aligned with the International Health Regulations (2005), which aim to help the international community prevent and respond to acute public health risks that have the potential to cross borders and threaten people worldwide.
- This conference is an important opportunity to examine in some detail what the practical implications are for disaster risk managers of engaging in actions to strengthen public health measures against emerging diseases and the threat of epidemics, in a consistent and regular way.
- Bearing in mind that thousands of people died in heatwaves last year and that climate change is having profound effects on disease vectors, this meeting is also

an important opportunity to see how we can plan for better health outcomes when we are facing more extreme weather events and significant environmental changes.

- We need to examine measures that national disaster management agencies and other actors can take to ensure that public health personnel and infrastructure including health outposts, clinics and hospitals are protected from man-made and natural hazards.
- All of the seven targets of the Sendai Framework can be interpreted as having a direct bearing on health risk.
- Five of the targets seek: substantial reductions in mortality and the numbers of people affected by disasters, the protection of critical infrastructure including health facilities, a reduction in economic losses and a substantial increase in multi-hazard early warning systems.

- The Sendai Framework also provides an opportunity to ensure countries include health in new, or revised, national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020.
- The Sendai Framework also calls for enhanced international cooperation to developing countries which should encourage a health-inclusive approach in these strategies.
- Implementation of the Sendai Framework has at least two key challenges.
- One is to bring about a paradigm shift from managing disasters to managing the underlying risk factors which drive those disasters. The Sendai Framework goes beyond the traditional remit of natural hazards to include technological disasters such as nuclear accidents, and biological threats such as outbreaks of Ebola, SARS, H1N1, dengue or the Zika virus.

- The second challenge is bringing about a change in the traditional perspective on disaster management so that health - including public health and public health infrastructure – becomes a key area of focus for disaster risk reduction knowing that an under-resourced and poorly protected health system can multiply the impact of any disaster event on exposed and vulnerable populations.
- The Sendai Framework calls for a breaking down of silos between more traditional areas of focus for disaster managers such as natural hazards so that they be equally engaged and effective in responding to public health emergencies.
- We live in an inter-connected world where natural hazards can trigger a health crisis or a technological disaster. Cascading impacts from one event can multiply and expand the numbers of people affected in unforeseen ways.

- This was a feature of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami - five years ago tomorrow - which claimed thousands of lives and triggered a major health emergency following a nuclear meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant which caused a major release of radioactivity.
- Floods in Malawi in January 2015 knocked out health facilities, destroyed patient records and personal stocks of life-saving medication in areas where there is a high prevalence of infectious disease including HIV/AIDS and TB. Lives were saved thanks to effective early warnings but the secondary impacts showed up severe shortcomings in protecting health infrastructure.
- The location of health facilities is a major cause of concern in disaster-prone settings. The ground floor of the main regional hospital serving Tacloban was inundated by the tidal surge which accompanied Typhoon Haiyan when it struck the Philippines in November 2013 and staff had less than an hour to move patients in intensive care to safety. The hospital's

power supply was knocked out for a vital couple of days as casualties started to arrive.

- This first conference on Health and the Sendai Framework has the potential to be a key milestone which will confirm the central place of health on the disaster risk reduction agenda.
- An integrated approach to health and disaster risk reduction is now an all-of-society imperative. That is evident in the global fight against the Zika virus.
- Zika has spread rapidly over recent months to 39 countries, and its possible links with neurological complications and birth malformations have changed the risk profile of Zika from a mild threat to a very serious public health emergency. Like many other public health emergencies, it is also having economic consequences with fewer people travelling to affected regions.

- Resilient health systems require long- term investment in key elements including an adequate number of trained health workers; robust health information systems, including surveillance; appropriate infrastructure; sufficient financing and transparent financial management systems, and a strong health governance system that ensures quality and accountability. Global investment in research and development for medical products, vaccines and diagnostics is also critical.
- One outcome of this conference must be a commitment to enhanced cooperation between health authorities and other relevant stakeholders and support for the integration of disaster risk reduction into national health policies and plans.
- We also need to foster cross-border cooperation and develop partnerships between health agencies and disaster management agencies. Disaster risk reduction needs to be included into health education

and training of health care workers and community health volunteers.

## **Conclusions and closing**

- We hope that the outcomes of this Conference will set the course for further collaboration on the implementation of the Sendai Framework and also help achieve the objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on climate.
- Your discussions and deliberations here will feed into the *Asia Regional Plan for the implementation of the Sendai Framework* that will be announced at the next Asian Ministerial Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction, to be hosted by the government of the Republic of India in New Delhi in November 2016.

I look forward to working with you on the implementation of the recommendations of this conference. Thank you.