Establishment of an Advisory Scientific and Technical Group for the ISDR

INTER-AGENCY TASK FORCE ON DISASTER REDUCTION

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I. Background

Science and technology play an important role in disaster reduction activities in respect of natural hazards and related environmental and technological disasters. All major achievements in these fields have not only been attributable to science and technology but many activities were initiated by the scientific community which felt it had a responsibility to support the reduction of disaster-related risk.

Throughout the IDNDR and during the first year of the establishment of the ISDR, science and technology have been explicitly recognised as a key input in the strategy aimed at promoting successful risk reduction. This is recognised in the structure of the ISDR. The Inter-Agency Task Force includes a number of scientific organisations such as UNESCO, WMO and ICSU while the ISDR Secretariat has a desk dedicated to scientific and technical issues. The experience of the IDNDR shows that successful longer-term prevention strategies must be based on cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary co-operation involving the scientific community, national and local governments, NGO's, the private sector, as well as the organisations and agencies of the UN system.

During the first year of the ISDR, it has been mentioned on a number of occasions that a suitable structure should be put in place to increase the involvement of the scientific, technical and academic communities in the formulation and implementation of disaster reduction strategies. Such a scientific advisory structure should not be conceived as a straightforward continuation of the IDNDR Scientific and Technical Committee (STC), but should instead build on the experience gained during its ten years of operation (see section II).

The purpose of this paper is to briefly examine the main lessons learnt from the STC experience and to formulate proposals for the establishment of a scientific advisory structure for the ISDR.

II. IDNDR Scientific and Technical Committee (STC), 1990-1999

The IDNDR STC was established on the basis of GA resolution A/RES/44/236 to advise the UN Secretary-General on matters related to disaster reduction.

The STC held two meetings a year, financed and serviced by the IDNDR Secretariat. These meetings lasted a week in the beginning and three days towards the end of the decade. The STC was composed of 20 to 25 members and rotated in theory every three years, although in practice this proved very difficult. In carrying out its work, the STC established as many as seven ad-hoc groups. It also launched a number of "Demonstration Projects". However these were nearly always carried out by STC member institutions, which produced some competition within the STC.

i. **Advantages of the STC**

The STC undeniably added credibility to the activities of the IDNDR. Moreover, the STC members played an important role in propagating the "culture of prevention", in particular in their own countries and fields of competence, where they were often very influential.

ii. **Disadvantages of the STC**

At the end of the Decade, the STC was perceived as having made only a modest substantive contribution to the work of the Decade. On the other hand, the STC members themselves felt that their expertise had not been sufficiently utilised. This situation was to some extent due to the fact that they were required to report directly to the Secretary-General, although the STC never actually reported to him, but instead always communicated through the IDNDR Secretariat. Moreover, the relationship between the STC and the Secretariat was never clearly defined. Towards the end of the Decade, the STC would often simply request the IDNDR Secretariat to actually produce work based on their recommendations.

III. **Purpose of the new Advisory Scientific and Technical Group**

All of the activities carried out by the Secretariat for the ISDR, the Inter-Agency Task Force and, indeed, all of the disaster reduction constituencies, include a scientific and technical component. The purpose of an Advisory Scientific and Technical Group is therefore to provide substantive technical advice and support, when applicable, in the formulation and implementation of the activities carried out by the broad ISDR constituency. In particular the Advisory Scientific and Technical Group will:

- bring up-to-date scientific and technical knowledge to bear on disaster reduction and thus increase the credibility of the outputs of the Secretariat for the ISDR envisaged in the Secretariat's *Workplan*. It will also provide technical support in specific areas of the work of the Secretariat and also of the Working Groups set-up by the Inter-Agency Task Force.

- suggest to the Secretariat for the ISDR and the Inter-Agency Task Force, activities and initiatives that could be carried out based on their review of priorities and gaps in disaster reduction

- facilitate contact with the scientific community as key actors in support of disaster reduction.

The work of the Advisory Scientific and Technical Group will encompass all aspects of the scientific and technical dimensions of disaster reduction. This will include geological, hydrological, and meteorological fields, as well as the social, economic and environmental dimensions of risk reduction. In particular, the Group will focus on the scientific and technical aspects of vulnerability and risk assessment, community development, information gathering, processing and exchange, as well as new technologies such as remote sensing and their applications to disaster reduction.

IV. **Suggested structure**
In order to reflect the multi-disciplinary facets of disaster reduction while achieving an optimum level of efficiency, the Advisory Scientific and Technical Group will comprise 12 members drawn from different disciplines.

i. **Reporting**

The Advisory Scientific and Technical Group will be established as an advisory body to the Task Force and the Secretariat for the ISDR. The Secretariat for the ISDR will report on a regular basis to the Task Force on activities carried out by the Group.

ii. **Membership**

Members will be drawn from different geographical regions and from among individuals and institutions with a reputation for scientific excellence. The membership should reflect a multi-disciplinary approach to disaster reduction and therefore experts will be drawn from various fields. The Secretariat for the ISDR, in consultation with members of the Task Force, will identify suitable persons from the global disaster reduction community to serve as members of the Group.

In order to encourage the widest participation of the scientific community, while ensuring continuity in the work of the Advisory Scientific and Technical Group, the membership of the Group which will be for two years will be rotated annually with six new members selected each year beginning at the end of its first two years of operation. The Chair will also be appointed initially for two years but will be eligible to be reappointed to serve subsequent terms.

Members retiring from the Advisory Scientific and Technical Group will remain members of the ISDR Scientific and Technical network. This open-ended network will benefit from the exchange of information in the context of the work of Advisory Scientific and Technical Group and will be encouraged to provide, on a continuing basis, inputs and comments on the implementation of the ISDR.

iii. **Meetings**

The Advisory Scientific and Technical Group will normally meet twice a year. The Chair of the Group will be invited to participate in the meetings of the Task Force.

iv. **Name**

The official name of the main Group will be the ISDR Advisory Scientific and Technical Group.

V. **Appointment**

The members of the Advisory Scientific and Technical Group will be appointed by the USG for Humanitarian Affairs in his capacity as Chairman of the Task Force.