

Assessment of Progress in the Implementation of the HFA  
A Regional Perspective from the Americas

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United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR)  
Global Platform for the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA)

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Global and Regional Perspectives session  
room 1  
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Mr John Holmes, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator,

Madam Margareta Wahlstrom, UN Assistant Secretary-General and Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction,

Ambassador Albert Ramdin, OAS Assistant Secretary General,

Heads of National Delegations and Inter-governmental Organizations,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In the Americas, an evolution from a predominant focus on humanitarian assistance to a policy of integrated, multilateral cooperation in addressing the underlying causes of natural disasters has been well noted. However, efforts on the ground still remain in the sphere of disaster preparedness, response and assistance; and little progress is observed in vulnerability reduction and reduction of underlying causes of risk, associated to development processes.

At the hemispheric level, the OAS *Inter-American Strategic Plan for Policy on Vulnerability Reduction, Risk Management and Disaster Response* represents a milestone in the Americas, in the quest towards an *ex-ante* approach and a change of paradigm from Disaster Response to Disaster Risk Reduction.

The *Inter-American Committee on Natural Disaster Reduction*, established in 1999, through an OAS General Assembly resolution, offers the ideal stage to take on this challenge at the hemispheric level, as it convenes key agencies of the Inter-American System responsible for core development issues and sectors. Nonetheless, the Inter-American Committee has yet to find a way to advance concrete, on-the-ground, operational arrangements capable to capitalize on the comparative advantages and competences of its members and partners.

The Inter-American Strategic Plan and the Hyogo Framework for Action differ, yet, complement each other in their scope and depth. And when we compare them both with the emerging approaches at the sub-regional levels, it is clear that in the scope of inter-governmental interplay, the sub-region holds a key position to influence national policy and practice, while the region offers the means to facilitate sovereign state participation in broader South-South cooperation initiatives. Likewise, the regional and sub-regional intergovernmental political organizations have exhibited less a propensity to consider or address Disaster Risk Reduction as a sector, and more ability to convene development sectors to discuss disaster risk reduction issues.

The Inter-American Network for Disaster Mitigation offers a unique opportunity to support South-South Cooperation for the sharing of knowledge and practical experiences in implementing the National Platforms. The challenge now is to make all sub-regional and regional initiatives converge, so as to capitalize on the Network, as well as to provide content to it and minimize duplications and diversions.

At the sub-regional level, the Caribbean Community, CARICOM, the Central American System for Integration, SICA, the Association of Caribbean States, ACS, and the Community of Andean Nations, CAN, provide for the institutional framework to support disaster risk reduction across all government sectors, through their specialized agencies.

Within CARICOM, for instance, the former Caribbean Disaster and Emergency Response Agency, CDERA, now transformed into the Caribbean Disaster and Emergency Management Agency, CDEMA, promotes a Comprehensive Disaster Management Strategy and Framework Program convening a wide range of institutions, covering a wide range of productive and economic sectors responsible for reducing disaster risk. In Central America, SICA, has promoted the integration of risk reduction across all economic and productive sectors through its specialized agencies, and on the basis of a commitment that emanates from the Central American Presidents *to warranty that sector and land development planning incorporate disaster risk reduction, as a concept, requirement and common practice.*

Yet much progress remains in disaster preparedness, response and assistance, as we have seen a significant reduction in deaths during recently past disasters, but an increase in people displacements, economic losses, and economies slow-down. While we observe a change in the statutes and programmatic approach of sub-regional disaster response agencies, such CDEMA, in CARICOM, and the Central American Center for the Coordination of Disaster Prevention, CEPREDENAC, in Central America; disaster risk reduction has not been yet well integrated into other agencies of the sub-regional inter-governmental organizations, which deal directly with the sector ministries responsible for the development agendas. That is ministries of planning and finance, ministries of agriculture, ministries of tourism, and ministries of public works and housing, among others. Yet, the sub-regional inter-governmental organizations hold the best position to make this happen.

At the national level, those countries that are more exposed to natural hazards and have a history of recurrent “intensive” disasters, such as those that result from tropical storms and hurricanes, seismic and volcanic activity, as well as frequent intense rain falls due to the El Niño Southern Oscillation phenomena, ENSO, have shown more progress in establishing their National Platforms. Disasters have provided these countries with the opportunity to learn to organize themselves before tragedy and catastrophe, improving in that way their coordination mechanisms for preparing and responding to disasters. This has become an advantage, as they can build their National Platforms on the basis of their National Emergency Systems. But in turn, it may pose a constraint to building functional and organizationally-structured platforms capable to address the underlying causes of disaster risk. The fact that there are built on the basis of “emergencies” is just a hurdle to move towards a development planning-driven National Platform.

Concurrently, those countries less threatened by “intensive” natural hazards show the least progress in the establishment of their National Platforms. Contrary to the other group, these countries do not have the experience that frequent emergencies provide, and neither the urgency to act upon. Hence, they do have the unique opportunity to build their National Platforms from a “state of planning” and based on a National Development Agenda.

In the end, both groups have much to offer to and learn from each other, and the Inter-American Network for Disaster Mitigation offers a unique opportunity to transfer and share those experiences and knowledge.

National Platforms must be built on the basis of local platforms that are specific-risk centered. This is expected to result in more inclusive mechanisms.

The First Session is a clear understanding that the Regional Platform of the Americas is established as a process, rather than as a single or a series of events and meetings. Furthermore, the Regional Platform of the Americas is founded on the existing instruments and mechanisms of the Inter-American System, and it is then completed with representatives from all other segments of the society.

In closing, while this statement may not necessarily reflect the views or the official position of the organizations that compose the Regional Platform, I would like to express my gratitude, on behalf of my colleagues at the General Secretariat of the OAS and UNISDR Americas, to all those who contributed to the organization and presentation of the First Session of the Regional Platform of the Americas and this process. More particularly, I would like to recognize the Government of Panama that was instrumental in organizing the First Regional Platform. Special recognition goes to the members of the inter-governmental organizations, specialized agencies of the UN, International NGOs, such as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, IFRC, the World Bank, all agencies of the Inter-American System, and all independent practitioners, experts and scientists who have.

Thank you.