



Address

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Address by President Hans-Rudolf Merz to mark the opening of the second session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction

Geneva, 16 June 2009

Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to Geneva, a city with a humanitarian tradition.

The saying goes that it is better to prevent than cure. In the field of natural disasters, the task of prevention is becoming increasingly important. Flooding, drought and earthquakes pose enormous challenges. Switzerland has supported the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, whose secretariat is based in Geneva, since its creation. Our country was also involved in the efforts of the international community to draft the Hyogo Declaration and the accompanying Framework for Action 2005-2015 drafted in Kyoto.

Next year we will already be mid-way through work to implement the Hyogo Framework for Action. It is therefore vital that we start to work on concrete proposals to improve the impact of efforts at all levels – local, national and global.

Almost a third of Switzerland's territory is mountainous. Our history is marked by the challenges and responses to sometimes hostile natural phenomena - avalanches, landslides, torrential rains, storms, flooding and earthquakes. Each climatic change constitutes a new threat. Floods now occur in regions previously considered safe. The glaciers are melting at an alarming rate. The rise in the 0° isograd leads to a melting of the permafrost which can result in rock falls, earth displacement and landslides.

That is why Switzerland is investing 2.9 billion francs each year to protect itself against natural hazards. Of this amount, 1.7 billion francs are borne by insurance companies, private sector businesses and households. Less than half of these costs are covered by the public sector, which represents a cost of around 400 francs per inhabitant per year.

Each country has experience and know-how that it can share to help address today's challenges. Switzerland is responding to the challenges of prevention and preparation by means of an integrated approach. This approach and our experiences are characterised by collaboration between the various public authorities, citizens and private sector businesses – such as insurance companies.

We apply the principles of individual responsibility and subsidiarity with good results. The State plays a steering role by establishing framework regulations and technical instructions and by providing financing. Responsibility for operational implementation rests with the cantons and local authorities.

However, Switzerland is merely one nation among many and for that reason must contribute to the search for global solutions. Along with other countries, we are dependent on global solutions. We therefore depend on the outcomes that emerge from this conference. I hope that you enjoy your stay and that your fruitful exchanges enable you to lay the foundations for sustainable development, and the guarantee of more effective protection for the world's population against natural disasters.

Thank you.