

**U.S. Statement to the second session of the  
Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction**

Mr. Chairman, Fellow Delegates,

On behalf of the U.S. Government, I want to thank the United Nations and the Government of Switzerland for hosting this Second Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction. I am pleased and honored to lead the U.S. delegation at this important conference and to join everyone here in contributing to this worthy cause.

I would like to acknowledge the recently released International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) Global Assessment as an important tool to define the scope of our challenge and a sobering reflection of the growing risks we face.

As policies of the new Obama Administration begin to take shape, the U.S. remains committed to strengthening the ISDR. We realize that achieving our common goal – reducing the loss of life and property in our communities – depends upon successful implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action. As a nation, the U.S. continues to employ the principles of the Hyogo Framework in its domestic policies and practices, but rising to the global disaster-resilience challenge will take the collective action of government at *all* levels, non-profit organizations, the private sector and above all individuals trying to do what is best for themselves, their families and their communities.

For this reason, we would like to thank the organizers and the Government of Panama for hosting the Regional Platform for Disaster Reduction in the Americas this past March. It served as an opportunity to share our expertise and to learn from others who face risks similar to our own.

The thematic focus of this Global Platform resonates with the United States as we continue to rebuild from Hurricane Katrina, which in 2005 devastated several of our Gulf Coast communities and disproportionately affected the poor. More recently, Tropical Cyclone Nargis and the Sichuan Earthquake have solemnly reminded us of the continued vulnerability of

communities exposed to the forces of nature. Collectively, such disasters challenge all nations to strengthen the resilience of their communities in the face of extreme meteorological, hydrological, and geological events. How those events affect us reflects not only the power of nature, but also the decisions we make in how we build our societies.

Science and technology can play a critical role in supporting the quest to achieve disaster resilience. To better define this role, the U.S. National Science and Technology Council's Subcommittee on Disaster Reduction has identified six "grand challenges" for disaster reduction that, if addressed, could greatly reduce societal vulnerability. From a global standpoint, these grand challenges reflect the contributions that science and technology can make towards achieving the Hyogo Framework for Action. Last year, the Subcommittee produced a set of hazard-specific implementation plans which identify priority science and technology investments needed to make progress toward meeting these challenges. The U.S. Delegation is pleased to distribute a number of these documents here at the Global Platform as complementary materials to the Hyogo Framework. The common goals of the Hyogo Framework and the "grand challenges" reflect a shared commitment to building more disaster-resilient communities.

Like the Hyogo Framework, the "grand challenges" underscore the importance of communication, education, and social science in promoting an awareness of hazards and risk-wise behavior in order to take full advantage of the investments being made in monitoring and research to improve our understanding of natural hazards and their impacts.

In November 2008, disaster reduction experts and public officials organized over five million Southern California residents to participate in an earthquake preparedness drill. This exercise was designed to increase understanding and trust of earthquake-safety messages among at-risk populations to improve the odds that Californians will take life-saving actions when faced with a massive earthquake. The earthquake drill was part of a larger, multi-day series of workshops and events known as the Great Southern California ShakeOut. Among other benefits, these exercises provided valuable information by exposing weaknesses in Southern California's emergency response strategies and resources. Through events

like the ShakeOut, progress is being made across the U.S., reinforcing our belief that the challenge of promoting risk-wise behavior can only be met by effectively leveraging the findings of social science research.

Like the rest of the world, the United States struggles with perennial risks as well as new challenges to reducing vulnerability. The growing challenges presented by climate change will strain poor communities most of all. For this reason, we must remain committed to incorporating this critical issue into our strategy for disaster risk reduction.

The United States works with many countries to support disaster risk reduction, helping to improve their mitigation and response capabilities through the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and federal science and technology agencies. In particular, the U.S. Agency for International Development plays a critical role in enabling U.S. engagement with the developing world through programs aimed at saving lives and at protecting livelihoods, assets, and infrastructures while increasing the resilience of communities to natural hazards. Although FEMA's mission is domestic, interest from the international community in learning about U.S. emergency management takes FEMA employees abroad to share smart practices and lessons learned with our emergency management counterparts in other countries.

We look forward to participating in the productive sessions of this Global Platform and to finding new ways to share our best practices with others. We, as a global community, will not be able to address the risks disasters present without increased collaboration both in technological developments and international standards. The United States is committed to working towards these common goals.

Thank you.

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