*ESCAP Statement at the occasion of the 3rd Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction*

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The Asia and the Pacific region is the most disaster-prone region of the world. . The Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2009, a joint publication of ESCAP and ISDR, shows that the region generates only one quarter of the world’s GDP while accounting for 85 per cent of deaths and 38 per cent of global economic losses during 1980-2009. These percentages have increased further due to a spate of disasters in the region that included widespread floods in Pakistan, Thailand and Australia the Earthquake in New Zealand, followed by the devastating Earthquake and Tsunami in Japan. Myanmar’s and the Maldives’ graduation from the status of Least Developed Country (LDC) was delayed with a GDP loss of more than 21 per cent due to Cyclone Nargis and 65 per cent due to the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, respectively. Samoa, similarly, lost 20 per cent of GDP due to 2009 Tsunami. Small and fragile economies with their limited fiscal space are thus particularly vulnerable to disasters.

ESCAP serves as a regional hub for regional cooperation and technical support for disaster risk reduction. ESCAP’s history in assisting countries to reduce disaster risks dates back to 1957 when the Mekong River Commission was set up to build flood resilience on the principle of regional cooperation among riparian countries. ESCAP and WMO established the Typhoon Committee in the East and Southeast Asia 43 years ago and Panel on Tropical Cyclones in the Northern Indian Ocean 37 years ago. These regional mechanisms helped construct a regional early warning system for tropical cyclones that significantly reduced the disaster risk. In 2008, ESCAP further strengthened its focus on DRR by setting up the Committee on Disaster Risk Reduction, which meets biennially to discuss policy options and strategies on disaster risk reduction, and propose actions for endorsement by the Commission at its annual sessions.

Today, ESCAP’s approach to disaster risk reduction is geared towards mainstreaming disaster risk reduction in national development plans. The secretariat undertakes socio-economic analysis on disaster risk reduction and emphasizes that disaster risk reduction should be built into the work of sectors that go beyond disaster management offices. ESCAP in partnership with international agencies has conducted Damage and Loss Assessment as well as Post-disaster Needs Assessment upon request from disaster affected member states. It is also at the forefront of promoting information and communications as well as space-based technologies as tools of disaster risk reduction and management. For example, ESCAP provides organizational support to the Sentinel Asia initiative, it is developing in close collaboration with its partners, a web-based information sharing tool, called the Gateway for Disaster Risk Reduction and Development. .

ESCAP also administers the ESCAP Trust Fund for Tsunami, Disaster and Climate Preparedness in Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian countries. The objective of the Fund is to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated approach to resource mobilization for building and enhancing tsunami, disaster and climate preparedness capacities at various levels in accordance with the needs of the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian countries. The Fund primarily focus on early warning of coastal hazards such as tsunamis, coastal zone flooding, storm surges and cyclones adopting a multi-hazard approach. ESCAP would like to call for an attention of donors to contribute to the Fund.

ESCAP provided support to member countries in recovery and reconstruction after large disasters by building partnerships and sharing information in the region. This includes the 2008 Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar where ESCAP paved the road for international cooperation closely worked with ASEAN and the Government of Myanmar. Similarly, in 2010, ESCAP responded to the Pakistan Floods by organizing a high-level expert group meeting to share regional experiences in reducing water-related disaster risks working closely with the Government of Pakistan and UN Country Team in Pakistan. We are now preparing our support to Japan for sharing regional experiences in large-scale disaster recovery and reconstruction through closely working with the Government of Japan, Asian Disaster Reduction Center, and other partners in Japan.

Finally, ESCAP as chair of the United Nations Asia-Pacific Regional Coordination Mechanism (RCM), which aims to improve coordination among the work programmes of the organizations of the United Nations system, towards regional-level system-wide coherence and “delivering as one”, has taken several steps forward for building disaster resilience in the region. The most recent example has been the ASEAN-United Nations Strategic Plan of Cooperation on Disaster Management (2011-2015) in support of implementing the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER). The 2010 Joint Declaration on ASEAN-UN Collaboration in Disaster Management adopted by Heads of States and the UN Secretary General at the 3rd ASEAN-UN Summit in Ha Noi, Vietnam on 30 October 2010 is an important milestone.