



Statement by the Italian Delegation to the third session  
of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction  
(Geneva, 8-13 May 2011)

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

As Head of the Italian National Civil Protection Department, first of all, I would like to thank the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction for the efforts made, once again, in organizing this biannual meeting, which brings together all stakeholders active in Disaster Reduction at global level.

This third session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction has a particular meaning, as it represents the first opportunity for many of us to meet after the turning point of the first five years spent working on Disaster risk reduction and on the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005 – 2015.

As we all know, the likelihood of disasters has significantly increased over the last decades, as well as the degree of destruction caused by their effects. This is why the issue of disaster risk reduction is constantly ranking at the top of international political agendas.

Disasters are, however, much more the consequence of vulnerability and lack of resilience than the effect of natural events. This is a strong belief of the Italian Government and the guiding principle of the initiatives set up in the last two years. With its dense urbanization and consequent exposure to disasters, strong presence of buildings owing to its particularly rich cultural heritage, high incidence of a number of different risks, Italy is one of the most vulnerable countries in Europe. Addressing vulnerability is a very expensive goal, that cannot be achieved unless all public and private resources decide to join their efforts. Improving resilience, on the other hand, requires homogeneous, continuous and structured work which is made of cooperation, information exchange and common action by all the actors involved, whose work is devoted to civil protection purposes.

Bearing in mind these considerations, in 2008 the Italian Prime Minister set up the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, and assigned to the Italian National Civil Protection Department the responsibility of its coordination.

The Italian National Platform is closely related to the Civil Protection Service, building on the same collaborative and coordinated approach, including the aim to promote a continuous exchange of new trends and best practices within our boundaries and abroad with other foreign regional and national partners.

This approach has been fully recognized and appreciated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which in 2010 has published the results of a Review of the Italian Civil Protection, pointing out among other aspects: 1. the validity of the Italian model in coordinating emergency management resources, which the civil protection services of different countries have

become increasingly aware of 2. the remarkable achievements in implementing a coherent multi-risk approach to civil protection.

The structure of the Italian Platform is based on a strategic, operational and technical cooperation. At the strategic level, a Coordination Committee made of the top leaders of all public and private partners has been set up to ensure a strategic guidance to the Platform and a synergic cooperation among its political, scientific, technical and socio-cultural components. An Executive Committee operates at the intermediate level to guarantee a smooth daily management of the Platform's activities, to represent the platform in Italy and abroad and to spread information to all its members. But the key innovation introduced in Italy, that on this special occasion I would like to stress, is the bottom-up approach. The Executive Committee is made of all the leaders from the Technical Workgroups that represent the underlying structure of the Platform and its core technical and scientific branches. The seven Technical Workgroups set up so far, convene together on a voluntary basis the representatives of all the partners of respective relevance to deal with the most critical topics related to disaster risk reduction, building on existing capacities, practices and tools, with the aim of setting up new, commonly shared and integrated approaches.

I have also the pleasure to share with you a recent major achievement that Italy can be proud to acknowledge in the field of seismic risk. Seismic risk is of particular relevance to Italy. Earthquakes have caused over the last 43 years as many as 4500 victims and a public expenditure of some 150 billion Euro.

Following the devastating earthquake that struck L'Aquila in 2009, a Law decree was issued by the Italian Government with the aim to fund prevention measures over the whole national territory. That decree is ready to fund two major operations: 1. ensuring that new buildings abide by specific building safety codes and earthquake proof regulations, and 2. reinforcing earthquake prone buildings.

This provision, among other things, is likely to produce more positive side-effects such as: increasing awareness among the population; intervening on the most vulnerable structures located in areas which present high levels of risk; and stimulating co-financing by private sources and public institutions. The amount funded by the above-mentioned law corresponds to approximately 1 billion Euros, which will grant only a small part of the amount needed to achieve the final result. However, it represents an important initial step toward the implementation of a more effective prevention policy.

We are persuaded that in the near future these new approaches will allow to further improve the capacity of the Italian system to intervene in an economically efficient, timely and effective manner against disasters, at different levels and following different operational patterns, with a strong focus on preventing disasters and minimizing their potential effects.

At the regional level, the Italian Platform aims at representing a unique access point for all those organizations who are interested in a structured cooperation with Italy on disaster risk reduction. For this reason, some of the international initiatives currently managed by the Italian Civil Protection Department will soon converge under the auspices of the National Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction.

The above mentioned international initiatives are mostly regional, having as natural areas of activity the Balkans and the Mediterranean basin. Italy shares several interests with the countries of those areas, and wants to contribute to a more stable and fruitful cooperation on disaster prevention and reduction, climate change, disaster preparedness and management. It is well known, for example, that Mediterranean countries are characterized by a common geological history, climate, similar exposure to risks and increasing phenomena of desertification, population growth and urbanization.

These natural risks often are not confined within national boundaries and we could say that they don't "need visas". Fully aware of this reality, Italy is entirely committed on the front line of the European side to share its experience, capacities and know-how with Southern and Eastern neighboring countries. The aim is to strengthen the cooperation and prevention of disasters in Mediterranean and Balkan countries.

In particular, the Italian Civil Protection Department is promoting reinforced national Civil Protection services in the Euro-Mediterranean region and improved inter-institutional cooperation especially in prevention and preparedness sectors, adopting a common regional approach, as has been done by implementing the PPRD South initiative in the Euromed Programme. Other activities are carried out on a bilateral basis. This is the case, for example, of the renewed cooperation with the Albanian and Croatian governments.

The National Platform will be a valuable partner for all those Civil Protection organizations interested in setting up a positive, proactive and equilateral dialogue on these topics. The presentation of the Hyogo Framework for Action Mid-Term Review Report for Europe, that took place in Rome on March 9, 2010, and which registered a wide participation of representatives coming from Europe as well as from the Balkans and other Mediterranean Countries, has been the first step in this direction.

Natural disasters constitute a major impediment to the achievement of sustainable development as set out in the Millennium Development Goals. The repeated exposure to disasters sustains the cycle of endemic poverty and disaster vulnerability in Less Developed Countries. Italy welcomes the findings and recommendations of the Mid Term Review Report, which provide guidance for Governments in order to enhance awareness of disaster risk reduction offering tools for the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for action, sharing experiences and good practices and identifying remaining gaps. In this regard, the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) has a crucial leading role in the field of coordination, advocacy and information sharing.

In addition, Italy strongly supports the activities of the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery seen as a key player in reducing risks in low and middle income countries. The Italian government through the General Directorate for Development Cooperation is fully engaged in supporting third countries disaster preparedness, being active in Afghanistan, assisting the Afghan National Disaster Management Authority and the Afghan Red Crescent Society, and in three Latin American countries such Bolivia, through a collaboration with FAO, Guatemala and Honduras, in cooperation with Italian NGOs. Moreover, Italy played an active role in enhancing safety from ocean-based marine hazards in the Indian Ocean, through a recently concluded UNESCO project.

In closing my speech, I would also like to introduce an international initiative that the Italian Civil Protection Department is fully supporting in these months. Based on recent global disasters as well as a long term experience in monitoring and dealing with natural disasters linked to all kinds of risk affecting Italy, from earthquakes to tsunamis, from volcanoes to floods, from landslides to forest fires, we believe that the time has come for an initiative to be taken at a worldwide level in order to develop a Global and shared Risk Model.

The recent terrible events in Japan have demonstrated that we need to learn more about hazards, their interconnectedness, and their impact on human lives.

If disasters do not know political boundaries, then a global knowledge-sharing approach is required. The GRM Initiative should lead to uniform, standardised, internationally agreed methodologies and tools for computing and modelling the risks with reference to a large class of natural and man-made hazards.

Please stay with us for the upcoming Event “Science meets Practice” which will take place in the next few hours, where I will have the chance and pleasure to tell you something more about the GRM Initiative.

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