**STATEMENT BY SYED SHARFUDDIN, CEO OF MUSLIM AID AT THE PLENARY SESSION ON “INVEST TODAY FOR A SAFER TOMORROW: INCREASE INVESTMENT IN LOCAL ACTION” DELIVERED ON THURSDAY 12 MAY 2011**

*Bismillah Al-Rahman Al-Raheem*

*In the name of Allah, God Almighty, the most Compassionate and Merciful*

Madam Chairperson

Excellencies

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

At the outset I would like to place on record our gratitude to the organizers and sponsors of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction and World Reconstruction Conference focusing on the theme of *Invest Today for a Safer Tomorrow: Increase Investment in Local Action*.

We recognize how critical it is to engage with local communities in democratic societies for improving safety and security of people and reducing the impact of disasters.

Muslim Aid is particularly pleased that a large number of international NGOs, as well as the business sector have been given the opportunity to contribute to the outcomes and recommendations of this important conference.

The growing evidence of governments adopting innovative strategies to address disaster risk is highly encouraging. While our approach to addressing risks has become comprehensive, the intensity and number of disasters that have occurred in the first half of 2011 bear testimony to the fact that enormous challenges lie ahead, especially for those who are directly affected.

Madam Chairperson

Our strategy ought to remain open to fresh ideas and innovation to address disaster risk reduction. This calls for a rethink on how to broaden the mandate of certain global initiatives to achieve better results. For example, the mandate of the international community under Responsibility to Protect should be expanded to include measures for helping governments that are unable to prepare their populations adequately for natural or man-made disasters. This will also help to change the attitude of governments that are neither able to lead nor prepared to allow the international community to help their people.

We can and must benefit from the experience of countries that are economically strong and capable to deal with disasters and have demonstrated an ability to integrate disaster risk reduction in their national policies. This will encourage governments who are capable of leading their national efforts during disasters but are inexperienced or under-resourced to become open to change. In these situations international help can bring rapid results.

Madam Chairperson

In order to ensure that resources are raised systematically and predictably for financing local initiatives, governments should invest a certain proportion of their GDP in disaster risk reduction and endorse their policies with appropriate national legislation. Muslim Aid believes that with safe education and health included in such initiatives, a modest commitment by disaster-prone countries to spend at least 0.5% of their GDP on disaster preparedness will significantly improve the capacity of their local populations to soften the blow of disasters.

In those developing countries that are less prone to disasters such funds can be used to build food security, improve communications infrastructure and implement sustainable programs to eradicate poverty.

Although considerable progress has been made on bringing civil society organizations to the global platform for disaster mitigation and response, the route to the UN agencies’ funds to NGOs for disaster reduction and post- disaster reconstruction still passes though the countries’ Capitals. Governments sometimes regard NGOs as unnecessary appendices, especially in countries where NGO culture is non-existent, or where civil society organizations are politicized, or where there is a credibility deficit between international NGOs and local community. Faith-based NGOs like Muslim Aid have proved to be effective in multicultural societies and should be increasingly engaged to restore public trust between diverse groups and communities.

The success of local action will not be fully realized unless NGOs and civil society organizations receive complete acceptance of their important role in the new humanitarian order. The focus of investment in local capacity should be country-owned as opposed to government-owned.

Madam Chairperson

The record of successful interventions in post-disaster situations shows that while local institutions are supported in national response, they also gain from international good practice without setting aside local initiatives. Muslim Aid’s flood mitigation program in Ache, Indonesia, supported by multi-donor funding from the World Bank and other UN agencies after the 2004 Tsunami is an example of donors, aid agencies and the host government learning from each other to enhance community coordination and local resilience.

The work of disaster risk reduction does not start when a disaster is making world headlines. It is rather a test of how successful disaster preparedness has been before the act, involving careful planning and local capacity building. Many countries are unable to develop their national capacity in establishing a trained corps of volunteers in emergency response and early warning. Muslim Aid suggests that a specialized global agency for technical cooperation in risk mapping and risk reduction should be created under the Global Platform for capacity building in countries that lack an appropriate institutional response mechanism. This program can be funded from the existing overseas aid programs of donor countries and multinational facilities to be managed and administered by the UNISDR Secretariat.

Investment should also be focused on empowering rural communities, particularly women, to reduce their dependence on government-sponsored employment initiatives. Muslim Aid’s interest free microfinance program in countries with little or no social safety-nets such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Sudan is designed to enable poor people and small enterprises to become self sufficient without depending on government subsidies or outside help. An important lesson Muslim Aid has learnt in running this program is that mainstreaming should not ignore local solutions. Local ownership brings greater responsibility and global awareness. This is where good practice becomes an important tool to support local actions.

To conclude, post-disaster situations provide a fresh impetus to learn from the past and build on the existing architecture of disaster preparedness. This is often overwhelmed by other considerations such as post-disaster reconstruction and development, ecological impact of disasters, insurance claims, legal and financial implications and the overall political and economic vulnerability of states.

We must continue to build on local awareness, resilience and sustainability by regularly sharing best practice and experience and by placing people at the centre of the DRR agenda. Muslim Aid has signed strategic partnership agreements with a number of organizations such as the OIC and the IDB to enhance its rapid response. We remain fully committed to implementing this comprehensive agenda.

Thank you.

Muslim Aid

London

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