

**1<sup>st</sup> session of the Preparatory Committee of the  
3<sup>rd</sup> UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction  
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**Statement of the International Hydrographic Organization**

The International Hydrographic Organization (IHO) is the intergovernmental organization that sets the world's standards for marine surveying and charting. The IHO aims to ensure that all the world's seas, oceans and navigable waters are surveyed and charted.

The seas and oceans play a major role in sustaining human life and well-being. They are also a source of significant hazards including coastal storms, tsunamis, flooding, coastal erosion and land subsidence. The reduction of risks related to marine disasters is recognized as a major component of disaster risk reduction. In accordance with the Hyogo Framework for Action, significant efforts are being devoted to the development of mechanisms and capacities for early warning to disasters such as tsunamis.

Hydrography, knowing the depth and the nature of the seafloor, is the major controlling parameter in ocean dynamics and underpins the models for predicting the impact of coastal storms and tsunamis. Hydrography underpins also the forecasting of the likely spread and track of oil slicks as part of oil spill response plans.

Yet, less than 10% of the world's coastal seas and oceans have been systematically surveyed and charted.

This is a fact of which the public is generally unaware and which is either not acknowledged or else given a very low priority by many governments. It significantly limits the quality and reliability of early warning systems.

There is no indication of any significant improvement in the level of hydrographic surveying being conducted around the world. In the last three decades, the number of surveying vessels operated by IHO Member States has declined by one third. Furthermore, this reduction has not been matched by a corresponding increase in capacity through the use of more efficient technology, such as airborne laser bathymetry or multibeam sonar sensors, or through governments opting to use commercial surveying contractors.

Government-sponsored surveying activity is decreasing because of financial pressures. The immediate effect is that the more developed hydrographic offices concentrate on their home waters. This means that even less progress will be achieved in developing States with little or no surveying and charting capability of their own. These are usually the States where the situation is at its poorest and the risks often greater.

The very significant lack of hydrographic data and reliable, high resolution bathymetric data for many parts of the world's coastal waters should be a cause of particular concern and should be taken into account in the international strategy for disaster reduction.