

**World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction
Preparatory Committee
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**Statement of Ms. Desiree Schweitzer,
Deputy Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to take part in this Conference and I would like to express my thanks to our hosts for bringing us together to discuss considerations of the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction.

Within the **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe**, security is defined in a broad context - what we refer to as comprehensive security. This comprehensive security approach incorporates three dimensions, namely the politico-military, the economic and environmental, and the human dimension - human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In the **economic and environmental dimension** - also referred to as second dimension, our mandate is to monitor and counter risks to security and stability that are caused by economic and environmental factors and to promote co-operation in this field with the objective of conflict prevention and confidence building.

This year, the **OSCE is chaired by the Government of Switzerland**. Under the Swiss Chairmanship, the primary focus in the second dimension is natural disaster risk reduction and implications for security, including disaster prevention, preparedness, management and response.

Natural disasters affect the security of nations and individuals. Disasters injure and kill people, damage homes and infrastructure, and undermine key sectors of the economy. The consequences of disasters can fuel tensions and lead to conflicts within and among societies. In an interconnected world, even disasters of a local nature can have far-reaching consequences.

Within the OSCE area, natural disasters pose significant risks, including at the transboundary level. **Climate change**, coupled with rapidly increasing rates of urbanization, makes the impact of disasters much worse.

This is why **international, but also regional and transboundary, co-operation** on preparedness and response to natural disasters is important not only as a tool to address the immediate consequence of the disaster, but also as a co-operative and a confidence-building measure aimed at avoiding the risk of tension and conflict.

With its broad membership including **57 participating States**, the OSCE is well placed to contribute to the international community's efforts to improve co-operation on disaster risk reduction.

In the OSCE context, the importance of co-operation on natural and man-made disasters for the security in our region was already recognized in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, which has formed the backbone of the Organization's activities at the very outset. This was followed by several policy documents in the form of Ministerial Decisions and Strategies that highlighted disaster preparedness and management. Allow me to note some of the **commonalities** of all these documents:

First, OSCE participating States have usually considered disasters in the context of environmental emergencies.

Second, they refer to disasters - both natural and man-made - as a multi-dimensional challenge.

Third, all these commitments are targeted towards the OSCE participating States and are mostly encouraging co-operation among them.

In this respect, the **OSCE's engagement in the field of disaster prevention, risk reduction and response has ample room for expansion and consolidation.**

Having said that, the OSCE with its Secretariat in Vienna and its Field Operations in several countries, has taken a few but **concrete steps** in addressing disaster-related issues. Let me mention a few examples of our work: one of them is a project that we have been implementing for the last five years in South Caucasus for strengthening of national and regional capacities on wildfire management; another example is enhancing flood management capacities in the Dniester River Basin; another project aims at identifying the climate change and security hot spots in Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia. We are also taking some new steps in the field of community-based disaster risk reduction through the public environmental information Centres- so called Aarhus Centers- that have been established and supported by the OSCE for over a decade. Currently, the OSCE-supported network of Aarhus Centers includes 56 Centers in 14 countries. Ecosystem restoration to mitigate floods in two transboundary river basins in Eastern Europe is another new initiative that we are engaged in.

I would like to specifically underline the **growing priority of climate change** on the OSCE agenda, including project activities, in the light of crucial linkages between climate change and disaster risk reduction, as well as a broad set of security challenges resulting from climate change.

OSCE is not alone in these efforts. All the projects that I have mentioned are implemented within the framework of the **Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative** through which the OSCE partners with UNEP, UNDP, UNECE, REC and

NATO as an associate partner. The ENVSEC Initiative, since its launching in 2003 gives particular attention to natural disasters and their implications for security.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Against this background, I would now like to briefly turn to the **Hyogo Framework for Action and to the consultations on the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction.**

The project examples that I have given you indeed contribute to a number of priority areas mentioned there. In addition, I would like to mention two areas where OSCE could provide its specific expertise and experience:

Regional co-operation and strategies

Call for increased regional co-operation was evident throughout the HFA2 consultations as well as already included in the HFA. The OSCE can offer its network as a multi-stakeholder and multi-level platform to foster such co-operation and consult on regional disaster risk management strategies. The revision of the HFA is also an opportunity for the OSCE to take stock of the policies developed and progress made in building resilience and disaster risk management through OSCE policies and further integrating this in our programmatic activities.

Platforms and networks for exchange

Transfer and sharing of knowledge among and between regions is a recurrent theme in HFA and HFA2 and is an area where OSCE can be further engaged in particular in strengthening the capacities to meet transboundary disasters risks.

Tackling disasters in a comprehensive and cooperative way also represents an opportunity to strengthen and reinforce regional cooperation. Responding to any kind of disaster requires a mix of technical expertise, technological know-how, humanitarian support, preparedness, prevention and international coordination.

Only by sharing experiences, by pulling together expertise and approaches, by coordinating actions, an effective and rapid response to major disasters can successfully be achieved.

We believe that the OSCE is well-positioned to complement existing international efforts in disaster risk reduction and to bring in the security perspective.

Thank you.