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**Official Statement by
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of Foreign Affairs**

**“Better safe than sorry!
Making disaster resilience a cornerstone
of the development agenda”**

**Third UN World Conference
on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR)**

Sendai, Japan

14 March 2015

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have come together here in Japan where the destructive forces of disasters not only form part of the collective memory of the nation, but indeed that of the international community.

I take this opportunity to commemorate the victims of the devastating Great East Japan Earthquake and to commend the affected Prefectures for their outstanding reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts.

Switzerland is grateful to the Government of Japan for hosting this important conference. We also thank the United Nations and Special Representative Margareta Wahlström and her team for their tireless work. After the successful preparatory process for this conference in Geneva, Europe's capital of peace and development, it is our collective responsibility to move the disaster risk reduction agenda forward here in Sendai.

Switzerland is strongly committed to disaster risk reduction, for three reasons:

First, disasters are a huge challenge. **The number of displaced persons has markedly increased recently not just because of the many violent conflicts but also because natural disasters are forcing more and more people to leave their homes in search of a new beginning.** And the problem is getting worse as a result of climate change.

Second, measures for reducing disaster risks are cost effective. Such measures are key to the protection of development gains for future generations. This is smart investment that safeguards lives, assets and human potential.

Third, disaster risk reduction is a field where international cooperation is not just indispensable but also feasible. Ten years ago, the focus was still on “why” to reduce disaster risks; it has since shifted to “how” to reduce disaster risks “in the most effective way”. These positive dynamics in reducing disaster risk through cooperation are essential if we are to live up to our commitment to reduce people’s vulnerability and exposure to disasters.

Ladies and gentlemen

We are here to set the prevention and resilience agenda for the next generation. The humanitarian response mechanism has reached its limits. The shift from response to a combination of prevention and preparedness is overdue. Our commitment as political leaders to disaster risk reduction is essential to accomplish this shift.

Disaster resilience will remain a strategic priority of Switzerland’s international cooperation. A quarter of our bilateral humanitarian aid budgets will be allocated to preventive measures.

In line with Switzerland's bottom-up approach in dealing with disasters domestically, we also place a particular focus on promoting community resilience in our international engagement.

In Bolivia, for example, Switzerland supports a comprehensive DRR programme that includes flood protection and a meteorological information system for local agricultural producers. Together with improved agricultural practices, these measures have resulted in a reduction in annual losses caused by disasters by forty per cent for thousands of poor rural families. These families can spend the additional income on extra food, education and health services – they get more human security as a result of these efforts.

Another example concerns Pakistan where Switzerland is working closely with local communities of high mountain areas to enhance their resilience to the regular disasters after monsoon rains. We also work closely on DRR with Morocco, including on a network of nearly 800 neighborhood volunteers that is being established in five cities to strengthen response capacities on community level within the first hours after a disaster.

Ladies and gentlemen

Switzerland will further increase its political commitment to disaster risk reduction, in cooperation with other countries, the UN and other international organisations.

During our Chairmanship of the OSCE last year, we organised a major DDR conference in Prague to promote this issue in the Euro-Atlantic and the Eurasian region.

Disaster risk reduction will also be an important theme at the upcoming OSCE Asia Conference that we are co-organising with the Republic of Korea. This is the sort of subject that may well foster cooperative security in Asia, too.

2015 offers historic opportunities to also shape the vision of a safer and more sustainable world through a series of global multilateral processes, including the post-2015 agenda and the Paris conference on climate change. Switzerland actively engages in these processes and is seeking to contribute to optimal coherence between them. We will make it a priority to integrate the Sendai outcomes into the post-2015 agenda to achieve the greater resilience of people, communities and states.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Better safe than sorry! Prevention gives a bigger chance to the 'safe side' and less risk to the 'sorry side'. More prevention through more cooperation makes our common world a safer place; for people today and for the next generation.