

**UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND**

**STATEMENT TO THE**  
**THIRD UN WORLD CONFERENCE ON DISASTER RISK REDUCTION**

Delivered by  
Minister of State for International Development,  
Rt Honourable Desmond Swayne TD MP

Thank you, I welcome this opportunity to make a statement on behalf of the United Kingdom.

I congratulate our esteemed hosts – the Government of Japan – and the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) - for bringing the international community together to discuss disaster risk reduction. I express my thanks to the co-chairs and members of the Bureau for their guidance throughout this process.

2015 is a significant year for the poorest and most vulnerable in our world. This discussion on a new framework for Disaster Risk Reduction is the first in a series of international discussions which, combined, represent an opportunity to transform our approach to disaster risk management. Our deliberations here will be followed by the Financing for Development Meeting, the post-2015 sustainable development goals, the UN Framework for the Convention on Climate Change, and end with the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016. Each of these events will provide an important piece of the jigsaw we need if we are to reverse the growing risks posed by disasters. It is therefore vital that the agreement we are aiming for here, is fully aligned with, and has targets and indicators consistent with, these other processes. As the UK has consistently stated, it is through ensuring that there are

credible links that we will move closer to reducing humanitarian need, building resilience and achieving the global ambition to eradicate poverty.

The Hyogo Framework for Action has helped to mitigate the impact of disasters. It has brought greater focus on prevention, increased awareness of disaster risk and secured greater investment in disaster risk management. Attention to early warning systems that forecast and communicate potential shocks means that people are now better prepared or evacuated before disasters strike: in the UK 1.2 million people have signed up to receive flood warnings.

But globally we have yet to achieve the expected outcome of the framework. With the frequency and severity of disasters expected to increase and intensify, we must acknowledge and respond to the profound impact these can have on lives and livelihoods, particularly for the poorest. They are the hardest hit when disasters occur. We must pay particular attention to the most vulnerable: women and girls, elderly people, and those with disabilities.

It is therefore right that reducing disaster risk should be a key element of efforts to reduce poverty, promote economic growth, and put a halt to the rise in humanitarian need.

The UK has worked with the convenors to build a framework which:

- Is coherent with other international processes;
- Builds international cooperation and global partnerships;

- Strengthens disaster risk governance;
- Takes account of the particular needs of countries that are at risk of conflict and insecurity, as well as natural hazards; and
- Ensures that development investments are disaster proof.

We very much look forward to an agreement being reached on these and other issues in the coming days. The UK remains committed to working with you all to confront the threat posed by disasters to lives and prosperity wherever that threat emerges.

What is at issue today is as relevant to our domestic agenda as it is to our international work. Within the UK we remain committed to reducing disaster risk and enhancing resilience.

60 years after the 1953 east coast flooding that killed over 300 people and large numbers of livestock, destroying vast areas of farmland; a similar storm hit the very same region in December 2013. Huge tidal surges had the potential to devastate again, but this time nobody was killed, very little agricultural land was damaged and considerably fewer properties were flooded. Back then the financial cost to the UK, at today's prices, was £1.2 billion, whilst in 2013, the total cost of all flooding in the UK was £400 million. Spending by successive UK governments to prevent east coast flooding has saved many lives and prevented heavy financial losses. The UK Environment Agency now has evidence that for every pound they spend on flood prevention they save eight pounds in responding to floods.

I welcome the increased focus on the local level, which is the building block of resilience; the increased recognition of the important role of civil society, the private sector and science in supporting national and local leadership; and supporting countries to manage disasters by themselves. But we must do more to ensure proper governance and reporting against the framework and to think about how we support those in conflict-affected countries.

Action at the regional and global level plays an important role in supporting states, particularly through sharing good practice. We must keep in mind however that there is rarely a one size fits all approach to risk management.

We should therefore avoid calls to enforce mechanisms which fail to take account of the differences in risk profiles between countries and the systems already in place. We must recognise the prime responsibility of states themselves to reduce disaster risk.

Going into the negotiations which have brought us here today, the UK set out six priorities:

First, improving accountability – including through voluntary peer reviews (as the first country to be peer reviewed we recognise the benefits of this approach). We stressed the importance of setting clear targets and indicators and for improving the means to measure them.

Second, ensuring this agenda is both a humanitarian and development priority. We called for the new post-2015 Disaster Risk Reduction framework to be closely aligned with the wider post 2015 sustainable development goals and the World Humanitarian Summit, and to promote a broader and more integrated approach to risk management.

Third, we called for a greater focus on tackling the root causes of vulnerability, and addressing the political and institutional bottlenecks to building resilience.

Fourth, focusing on the most vulnerable, to reduce the disproportionate impact that disasters have on them - including a strong focus on gender, disability and age. The new framework should also look to help address disasters in complex contexts by encouraging a greater focus on strengthening resilience in fragile and conflict affected states.

Fifth, moving the focus from the national to the local and community level to encourage a more inclusive and participatory approach.

Finally, encouraging greater engagement from and with the scientific community, private sector and insurance industry. They have a vital role to play in building resilience and contributing to sustainable development.

We trust that in the coming days will deliver an agreement which is both ambitious yet credible in delivering on this agenda. We are

looking for an agreement which sets clear priorities and serves as an effective operational guide to action. We can achieve our goal to reduce disaster risk and build resilience at all levels. We welcome the discussions in the coming days and look forward to working together to create a better future for all.

Thank you

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