

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon
Geneva (Switzerland)
10 May 2011

Remarks to the Third Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction

It is a great pleasure to be with you today. You are at the forefront of reducing disaster risk and building communities of resilience in every corner of the globe. Thank you for coming together for this vital cause.

I am also pleased that this Platform will recognize the work of some outstanding champions for disaster risk reduction, such as H.E. Mr. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, President of Indonesia. I also congratulate the winners of the Sasakawa Award for their innovative and sustainable work on disaster risk reduction.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This conference's aim is to reduce risk of disasters, through technology, knowledge and economic tools. But for many of us, this mission is also deeply personal.

The United Nations is the global first responder to disasters and crises. As Secretary-General, I have seen the devastation of Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, the destruction from the epic floods in Pakistan ... the horrific impact of earthquakes in Haiti, Western China and Chile.

I have looked in the eyes of those who have lost loved ones. I have listened to those who have seen the world they know disappear in a flash. And I have struggled to answer their simple, one-word question: Why?

Just recently I was in Chernobyl, Ukraine. The hand of man was responsible for that catastrophe twenty-five years ago. But the earthquake and tsunami in Japan gave us the disaster in Fukushima with all its echoes of Chernobyl and a grave warning to the future.

As we have learned again and again, no country or city – rich or poor -- is immune.

But alongside the dangers from disaster rests the dangerous myth that acts of nature are just that – unavoidable or inevitable.

By our actions, we can either compound disasters or diminish them.

The difference is in preparedness. The difference is in us, in you.

We are at the mid-point of the Hyogo Framework for Action. There has been substantial progress at the global, regional and national levels.

That is one of the main messages of the 2011 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction which we are launching today.

It shows that as countries invest more in early warning and preparedness, mortality risk from floods and cyclones is trending down.

At the same time, economic loss and damage to homes, schools, health facilities and livelihoods are on the rise.

As we begin this meeting, I would like to make three points to advance our work.

First, we must accelerate our efforts. The world's vulnerability to disaster risks is growing faster than our ability to increase resilience.

As a result of global climate change, weather-related hazards are on the rise. Nuclear safety and the threat of multiple hazards add an even greater sense of urgency.

I know that making the case for investments in risk reduction can be an uphill struggle, particularly in tough economic times.

But we also know that solutions may be more a matter of spending wisely, not spending more.

Building local capacities. Effective early warning systems. Proper land use planning. Good building design. A focus on the needs of women.

Even small investments in building, planning and training can yield remarkable results.

Second, let us broaden the coalition for action.

Disaster risk reduction is everyone's business. I am encouraged that here at this conference we have an unprecedented assembly of mayors and other local leaders, parliamentarians, civil society leaders, the private sector leaders, and policymakers. Let us work together to empower and create communities of resilience.

Let me assure you that the United Nations is fully committed. We will continue to integrate disaster risk reduction and preparedness, as well as climate change adaptation measures, into our work around the world.

That leads me to my third and final point: Let us risk-proof development.

I arrived this morning from Istanbul and the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries.

The economies of the LDCs and small island developing states suffer the most from disasters - much of it driven by poverty, weather and climate variability and climate change.

No development effort will be equitable or sustainable unless disaster and climate risk measures are a part of the picture.

It is time to better connect risk reduction with sustainable development, especially as we prepare for next year's Rio-plus 20 Conference.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

By its very nature, the work of risk reduction may go unsung. The flood or earthquake one plans for may not happen for years, even generations.

And when it does, success is measured by what does not occur: The school that did not collapse. The building that did not fall. The village that was not destroyed.

But it goes far deeper. Your efforts are really about making sure that despite the fury and force of natural hazards, communities can continue to thrive ... families can continue to prosper ... children can continue to dream.

That is the essence of your work. And there is nothing more meaningful than that.

I thank you again for mobilizing your force for good to confront any force of nature. Let us work together with your strong leadership and commitment to make this world better and safer for all.

Thank you.

