WMO STATEMENT AT THE THIRD SESSION OF THE GLOBAL PLATFORM FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

10 – 13 MAY 2011

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND

Mr Chairman,

Excellences,

Distinguished Participants,

Dear Colleagues,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and Secretary General, Michel Jarraud, it is a great pleasure to address you on the occasion of this Third Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, which takes place in the aftermath of significant disasters in many parts of the world.

Indeed, Meteorological, hydrological and climate extremes such as floods, tropical cyclones, storms surges, extreme temperatures, droughts and wild fires or health epidemics and insect infestations, related to meteorological and hydrological conditions, continue to cause major devastation worldwide. The devastating January 2011 floods in Australia and Sri Lanka, the storm in Myanmar in March 2011, the unprecedented summer heat wave in Russia, the extensive flooding in Pakistan are a few recent examples.

Every year natural hazards cause significant loss of life and set back economic and social development by years, if not decades. As expressed in the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which the World Meteorological Organization co-sponsors with UNEP, there is increasing evidence of greater vulnerability to the risks associated with meteorological, hydrological and climate hazards, due to climate variability and change.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Over the last few decades, meteorological, hydrological and climate forecasts have become increasingly accurate and available as a result of remarkable international co-operation, facilitated by the World Meteorological Organization. This involves globally coordinated research and an operational

network, comprised of the WMO Global Observing System, Global Telecommunication System and Global Data Processing and Forecasting System for monitoring, detecting, forecasting and exchange of weather, water and climate related information, engaging National Meteorological and Hydrological Services of 189 Members countries. This network operationally supports early warning systems for tropical cyclones, emergency response activities focused on nuclear facility accidents, forest and wild fires, volcanic ash, dust and sand storms and chemical releases from industrial accidents.

On a global scale, as revealed by statistics for the past five decades, the economic losses attributable to hydro-meteorological hazards have increased nearly 50 times. However, the reported loss of life has decreased dramatically during the same period by a factor of about 10 as a consequence of the development of early warning systems (EWS) in a number of high-risk countries, thanks in particular to advances in metrological hazard monitoring and forecasting, as well as more effective and coordinated emergency preparedness and planning at national to local levels.

Beyond early warning systems, a comprehensive disaster risk reduction framework requires: (i) Scientifically sound risk assessment to quantify and understand the risks associated with natural hazards and their impacts, based on quality assured historical and real time data and climate analysis tools; (ii) Risk reduction and prevention through long-term sectoral planning in areas such as land zoning, infrastructure development, agricultural and water resources management etc.; and (iii) Risk transfer through the utilization of weather-indexed insurance and financing mechanisms to reduce and transfer the economic impacts of disasters at various levels and decision timescales.

Emergence of climate prediction and forecasting tools provides opportunities to provide critical information that can be used in economic activities through improved sectoral planning and risk reduction. Changing patterns of hazards are posing challenges with longer-term investments in infrastructure planning and retrofitting, as this requires building codes and specifications designed based on hazard characteristics. WMO in cooperation with a number of partners is working systematically to strengthen meteorological, hydrological and climate services to support various aspects of national and regional decision-making. Initiatives are underway in Southeastern Europe, Central America and the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia with initiatives also underway for Africa, Pacific and South America.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As demonstrated through examples in many countries, spending on improving weather forecasting and data sharing are high return investments. This was one of the major findings of the World bank and United Nations in the book, titled “Natural Hazards, UnNatural Disasters: The Economic of Effective Prevention” recently published. Thus, all government are highly encouraged to commit investment towards development of the capacities of their meteorological and hydrological services as critical providers of science-based information to support decision-making for risk assessment, risk reduction and risk transfer.

Virtually all sectors of economic activity experience significant economic impacts linked to weather, climate and hydrological hazards, with the agriculture, water and health sectors in the developing world being particularly vulnerable. These impacts having increasing significantly over the years, and are expected to continue to further increase due to increasing frequency, and severity of these events, linked in part to climate change.

For a World faced with meteorological hazards, understanding how climate is changing is key for planning effective risk reduction strategies. The extraordinary progress in climate modeling and forecasting over the last decade provides us with unprecedented opportunities for the development of climate services that will underpin the management of the risks of extreme weather events through informed medium- to long-term planning and risk management strategies

In 2009, The third World Climate Conference (WCC-3) (Geneva, Switzerland) attended by 13 heads of state, 57 ministers, 14 heads of UN agencies and programmes, decided to establish a Global Framework for Climate Services (GFCS) aimed at providing better climate services for all, and to do this we need: improved capability in climate data collection and exchange, continued investment in high-quality scientific research to develop new services, improved communication systems that can reach all climate service users and lastly, but possibly most importantly, global cooperation and coordination. Through this cooperation tailored climate information suitable for carrying out forward-looking risk analysis will be available to all that need it. A key focus of the Global Framework will be providing these services routinely and reliably to the most vulnerable in the developing world.

We will need the support of every nation and organization represented in this room as we move forward with the Global Framework for Climate Services and we look forward to working with all of you in making our world safer and more prosperous.

Thank you.