



WCDR HIGHLIGHTS: WEDNESDAY, 19 JANUARY 2005

On Wednesday, delegates to the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) continued to meet in numerous sessions of the Intergovernmental and Thematic Segments. In Plenary, the Conference heard over 70 general statements, and a special forum was held on links between disaster reduction and related intergovernmental processes. The Main Committee continued addressing the draft framework for action. In the Thematic Segment, the final high-level round table took place, and a special session on tsunami disaster mitigation in the Indian Ocean was held. Two thematic panels were convened on knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience, and on risk identification, assessment, monitoring and early warning. Throughout the day, sessions of the thematic clusters were held on environmental management and disaster reduction, and other issues.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL SEGMENT

PLENARY: Special forum on links between disaster reduction and other related intergovernmental processes: The special forum was chaired by WCDR President Murata. Ryutaro Hashimoto, UN's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation, urged participants to adopt the target to halve the number of lives lost to water-related disasters by 2015. AOSIS Chair Jagdish Koonjul underlined the importance of ensuring SIDS' access to affordable insurance and reinsurance schemes. Anwarul Chowdhury, High Representative for LDCs, Landlocked Developing Countries and SIDS, said the WCDR outcome should recognize the disproportionately high impact of disasters on SIDS and LDCs. Joke Waller-Hunter, Executive Secretary, UNFCCC, highlighted the link between adaptation to climate change and disaster reduction. James Morris, Executive Director, World Food Programme, noted that hunger takes as many lives each week as were lost in the Indian Ocean disaster.

MAIN COMMITTEE: The Main Committee resumed discussion of the framework for action (A/CONF.206/L.2) in the afternoon. Chair Ferrari noted disagreement on referencing climate change in several places in the text, and requested interested delegations to continue efforts to reach a compromise informally. JAPAN proposed adding text mentioning the objective of halving lives lost from major water disasters by 2015, but its placement was questioned by several delegations.

Delegates then turned to brackets around "natural hazards" under strategic goals to be adopted by the WCDR. IRAN suggested that agreement on deletion of "natural" is part of a "package" discussion on climate change, but this was opposed by the RUSSIAN FEDERATION, EU and JAPAN. Chair Ferrari said an informal group should continue discussions.

On a suggestion by the EU to include reference to "post-conflict" affected communities, JAPAN cautioned that this would

have an impact on the scope of the entire framework. Several countries supported the addition in principle, but the reference was bracketed. Chair Ferrari proposed that an informal group discuss reference to post-conflict rehabilitation.

Delegates then addressed the title of the section on priorities for action from 2005-2015, debating whether to refer to "recommended" priorities. The US insisted on retaining the word, stressing that the framework for action is a political, rather than legally-binding, document. He called for a statement to that effect from the WCDR President in the closing session. The EU, PERU, CUBA, NIGERIA and MOROCCO preferred removing "recommended." SOUTH AFRICA said a statement on the status of the document should be made by the US delegation, rather than by the WCDR President. ARGENTINA suggested deferring to past frameworks adopted by similar conferences. "Recommended" remained bracketed.

The US, with JAPAN, urged the removal of a reference to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. BRAZIL, with PERU, CHINA and MOROCCO, urged its retention, noting its relevance to sustainable development, international cooperation and climate change. CANADA proposed to refer to the importance of international partnerships as an alternative. The US agreed, and BRAZIL amended the Canadian proposal to refer also to international cooperation, with agreement conditional on the outcome of the informal discussions on climate change.

A number of paragraphs were agreed upon in the section on priorities for action, some with only minor changes. Text on the heavily indebted poor countries initiative and the unsustainable debt burden caused by disasters was put on hold, following a substantive US amendment. The RUSSIAN FEDERATION, supported by MEXICO and several others, proposed dropping the terms "provision" and "mobilization" in the paragraph on financial assistance to reduce risk. The text, however, was bracketed by CANADA, pending consultations. After a prolonged discussion on text pertaining to national platforms and risk reduction and management systems, and the submission of a new EU paragraph, Chair Ferrari suggested that interested delegations submit a common proposal on Thursday morning. Negotiations continued late into the night.

THEMATIC SEGMENT

SPECIAL THEMATIC SESSION ON THE PROMOTION OF TSUNAMI DISASTER MITIGATION IN THE INDIAN OCEAN: Koichi Nagasaka, Director-General, Japan Meteorological Agency (JMA), chaired the special session on learning from experiences in the Pacific Ocean for the establishment of tsunami early warning (EW) systems in the Indian Ocean.

Koichiro Matsuura, Director-General, UNESCO, said a tsunami EW system for the Indian Ocean could be implemented in less than a year, and stressed that such a plan should extend to all countries in the Indian Ocean basin, including relevant



African States and SIDS. In her keynote speech, Laura Kong, Director, International Tsunami Information Center, stressed the need for rapid sea-level evaluations, data sharing, and education on the limitations of EW systems.

Participants heard reports from the Pacific region. Charles McCreery, Director, Pacific Tsunami Warning Center, recommended a multilateral approach to an Indian Ocean EW system. Noritake Nishide, Director, JMA Seismological and Volcanological Department, presented Japan's EW system for local and distant tsunamis, including its forecasting technology. François Schindelé, Chair, International Coordination Group for the Tsunami Warning System in the Pacific, stressed that tsunami mitigation programmes must be implemented at national and local levels and highlighted two international technical meetings scheduled for March 2005 in Paris, France, on tsunami EW systems.

Participants then heard reports from the Indian Ocean. Prih Harjadi, Director, Indonesia's Geophysical Data and Information Center, reported on Indonesia's vulnerability to tsunamis. Kriengkrai Khovadhana, Deputy Director-General, Thailand's Meteorological Department, presented a plan to educate citizens and tourists. K. Radhakrishnan, Director, Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services, outlined an initiative for mitigating storm surges and tsunamis. Sarath Weerawarnakula, Director, Sri Lanka's Geological Survey and Mines Bureau, suggested an EW system for cyclones as well as tsunamis. Abdulahi Majeed, the Maldives' Deputy Minister of Environment Construction, said the recent tsunami set back development by two decades. Akihiro Teranishi, Asian Disaster Reduction Centre, stressed the role of basic tsunami awareness. Shimogouchi Tsukasa, Director, Disaster Management Division of Japan's Fire and Disaster Management Agency, outlined Japan's success in reducing tsunami risk. Reid Basher, ISDR, said an EW system should include social and natural scientists and civil society organizations.

Kenji Satake, Chair, Tsunami Commission of the International Union of Geodesy and Geophysics, chaired a panel discussion on the establishment and operation of a tsunami EW system. Shuhei Kazusa, Director, Japan's Earthquake and Volcanic Disaster Management Cabinet Office, highlighted Japan's preparedness measures. Fumihiko Imamura, Tohoku University Disaster Control Research Center, underscored the importance of studying earthquake mechanisms and tsunami propagation. Geoff Love, Australia's Director of Meteorology, recommended that an Indian Ocean EW system build on existing institutions to ensure its sustainability. Maryam Golnaraghi, Chief, WMO Natural Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Programme, noted a multi-disciplinary expert meeting to be held in Jakarta, Indonesia, in March 2005, and highlighted the importance of multi-hazard warning systems. Harjadi said Indonesia's ASEAN Earthquake Information Center could be strengthened to become a tsunami information center. Kong emphasized local community involvement and culturally appropriate responses.

HIGH-LEVEL ROUND TABLE: Emerging risks: what will tomorrow hold? This round table was facilitated by Sálvano Briceño, Director, ISDR.

Noting the specific vulnerability of SIDS, Keith Mitchell, Prime Minister of Grenada, said disaster reduction requires effective partnerships with all stakeholders, political will, and a global monitoring system. Li Xueju, China's Minister of Civil Affairs, called for the use of technology to improve risk assessment, disaster mapping and local capacity building. Michel Jarraud, Secretary-General, WMO, emphasized the high return of investment in disaster reduction and said WMO is committed to halving the number of lives lost due to disasters in the next decade.

Ashok Kumar Rastogi, India's Disaster Management Secretary, stated that disaster management should be decentralized and mainstreamed into development strategies. Josef Odei, Ghana's National Disaster Management Organization, on behalf of Thomas Broni, Ghana's Minister of the Interior, noted that EW systems are useless if not accompanied by

education of local communities. Daniel Biau, Deputy Executive Director, UN-HABITAT, recommended adopting compulsory and realistic building codes, discouraging settlement in disaster-prone areas, decentralizing disaster reduction, and using new technologies.

In the discussion, participants addressed the need to consider disaster reduction as a high return investment, reference to climate change, and the link between conflicts and disasters.

THEMATIC CLUSTERS: Cluster 3 Panel: Knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience: This panel was chaired by Alberto Maturana, Director, Chile's National Emergency Office.

UNESCO Director-General Matsuura emphasized the need to respect local knowledge. Purna Bahadur Khadka, Nepal's Minister of Home Affairs, stressed formal and non-formal education for raising earthquake awareness. Yukio Yoshimura, Vice President, World Bank, highlighted the Bank's Global Development Learning Network, and introduced interventions from participants in Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Vietnam, via live video conference. Hiroyuki Kameda, Professor Emeritus, Kyoto University, presented on field-based knowledge development and implementing innovation in research communities. Gloria Bratschi, Argentine prevention planning specialist, suggested employing methods used by the media for risk prevention. Eva von Oelreich, Director of Disaster Policy, International Federation of the Red Cross, spoke on the importance of building resilient communities, with due regard for local customs and cultures. Everett Ressler, UNICEF Emergency Services, stressed children's vulnerability to disasters, and proposed prioritizing children in risk reduction strategies.

Cluster 2 Panel: Risk identification, assessment, monitoring and early warning: This panel was chaired by Helen Wood, US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Barbara Carby, Jamaica's Office for Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management, said decentralization of capacity can empower communities, but that maintaining interest is difficult, especially if extreme events occur infrequently. Kenzo Hiroki, Japan's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, stated that EW systems could halve the number of deaths caused by water disasters by 2015, but only if they include evacuation infrastructure and education programmes. Laban Ogallo, Project Coordinator, WMO Drought Monitoring Centre-Nairobi, outlined the difficulty of monitoring in countries with low technological capacity. Erich Plate, University of Karlsruhe, called for an interdisciplinary approach to risk management and risk-commensurate forecasting methods. On establishing actionable EW systems, Loy Rego, Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, underscored the need to learn from good practices and respect local knowledge.

In the discussion, participants addressed the definition of vulnerability, time-bound targets, risk-sharing in poor communities, man-made disasters and cross-border sharing of real-time data.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Several delegates were heard wondering about the long-awaited draft declaration expected to be tabled for the Conference's consideration, but most anticipate that the brief text will be released on Thursday. This paper was originally drafted by the host country and it is understood that every effort has been made to produce a non-controversial paper that could safely sail through Plenary. It remains to be seen, however, whether delegates who were warming up their negotiating muscles in a Wednesday evening and night session of the Main Committee might not want to have a go at the draft declaration as well.

Meanwhile, another draft Conference outcome document became available late Wednesday - the "Common Statement of the Special Session on the Indian Ocean Disaster: Risk Reduction for a Safer Future." It combines various initiatives suggested during the WCDR, including the German offer to host a UN conference on early warning.