

**The World Ministerial Conference on Disaster Reduction
in Tohoku**

Tuesday 3 July 2012,

Sendai City, Japan

2.45pm local time

Opening Statement

Helen Clark

Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme

Your Excellency Mr. Yoshihiko Noda, Prime Minister of Japan,

Your Excellency Mr. Koichiro Gemba, Minister for Foreign

Affairs of Japan,

It is an honour to address this important conference today. At the outset I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to our hosts for their hospitality, and to acknowledge Japan's tremendous leadership in disaster risk reduction and recovery.

At Rio+20, Foreign Minister Koichiro Gemba demonstrated Japan's commitment to this agenda, by pledging \$3 billion for disaster reduction to developing countries over the next three years. This generosity in difficult times is highly commendable.

While no country is immune to disasters associated with natural hazards, we are all well aware that there is much which can be done to reduce their impact by better preparing citizens and communities to withstand the related shocks and disruption.

This Conference is about how to build resilient societies and to mainstream disaster risk reduction at the local, national, and regional levels. It is also an opportunity to be part of the consultation process, initiated in March by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), to shape the agenda for disaster risk reduction beyond the Hyogo Framework for Action, which expires in 2015.

Only fifteen months ago Japan itself suffered grievously from the Great East Japan Earthquake and the tsunami which followed. So many lives were lost and communities shattered. The world stood in solidarity with Japan at that terrible time.

We also learned a lot from Japan as it responded to this very testing crisis. Japan had long made disaster risk reduction a top policy priority, and built institutional and legal frameworks which reflected that. Its approaches to disaster risk reduction and recovery have been participatory, engaging a wide range of stakeholders and citizens. It has also built capacity to cope in the face of disaster at all levels of government in the country. This extensive preparation helped prevent long term impacts on the country's development after March 2011.

By convening this conference, Japan is able to share its knowledge with other countries and contribute a great deal to the global discussion on disaster risk reduction and recovery.

The countries of many gathered here today have experienced severe natural disasters and their devastating impact on human life, families, communities, infrastructure, and economies. We have seen our countries work to recover from these crises, and improve resilience and preparedness for future disaster.

It is important to acknowledge what has been done well in the past, and what could be done better in the future, to strengthen the resilience of communities and ensure that the poorest and most vulnerable people do not disproportionately bear the brunt of disasters.

We must also focus on the cross-border dimensions of disasters, which with the effects of climate change are only likely to grow. Large-scale disasters like those brought by Hurricane Mitch in Central America and the Caribbean in 1998, the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004, and recurrent drought in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel are cases in point.

Thus reducing risk and building resilience requires joint reflection and analysis, pooling of resources and capacities, and sharing best practice not only within nations, but also across regions. It is my hope that this conference will make important contributions to this agenda.

In more than eighty countries, UNDP has worked with governments and communities to strengthen capacities for disaster risk reduction and recovery. For us, building such resilience is integral to locking in development gains. Last year alone we reported results of our work in this area in close to sixty countries.

As part of that work, UNDP supports endeavors to accelerate implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action, and will continue to do so in support of its successor arrangements. Some of the key issues which require continued or increased attention in a post-Hyogo framework beyond 2015 include:

(1) Bringing disaster risk reduction to the center of development practice;

There is compelling evidence that sustainable development and disaster risk reduction go hand in hand. The impact of disasters can be anticipated, managed, and mitigated if appropriate policies and actions are in place.

Recognizing that, UNDP advocates for the integration of disaster risk reduction concepts into sustainable development discussions and frameworks – most recently at the Rio+20 Conference. These considerations should also help shape the post-2015 development agenda, and the setting of new goals and targets. The timing of this fits well with the discussion of priorities for what follows the Hyogo Framework for Action of 2005 – 2015.

Forging resilient societies requires long-term approaches to building institutions and networks and expanding knowledge and resources. There are many promising examples from which to learn, not least here in Japan, as the post-Hyogo framework is shaped.

(2) Building increased resilience for the future into recovery processes;

When planned well, recovery efforts can help restore and support development efforts, transforming communities while also repairing and addressing immediate recovery needs. When managed poorly, however, recovery efforts can increase inequality and vulnerability to future disasters. For this reason, at UNDP, we are committed to supporting developing countries struck by disasters to build back better – an approach which was so successfully applied in Aceh after the December 2004 tsunami.

(3) Reforming governance arrangements for effective disaster risk reduction at national and local levels;

The quality of governance is an important determining factor in the success or failure of disaster risk reduction strategies, policies, and responses. Many countries have made progress on mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into their national policy frameworks and have improved institutions and laws, creating a conducive environment for building resilience.

Much of this effort has been focused on the important work of strengthening disaster response and preparedness functions. Less attention to date has been given to reducing disaster exposure and vulnerabilities through preventive measures such as better land use planning, building codes, and environmental management.

The post-Hyogo Framework should go further in emphasizing the importance of effective governance in managing and ultimately reducing risk. More attention will need to be given to local level and urban risk management; the allocation of sufficient capacity and resources; and a greater convergence of the development, environment, and climate change agendas around policy, institutional arrangements, and implementation.

(4) Focusing on cross-cutting issues;

The Hyogo Framework highlights a number of cross-cutting areas to be addressed in achieving sustainable risk reduction. They include participation, capacity building, and gender considerations.

As well, many high risk countries are exposed to several hazards, and their risk reduction strategies need to take the full range of them into account. A country exposed to both hurricanes and earthquakes obviously needs resilience to both. Here in Japan in March last year, the disaster had three dimensions, interacting to devastating effect.

The post-Hyogo discussions are an opportunity to explore more effective ways of addressing cross cutting issues and challenges in disaster risk reduction, as many countries report slow progress on them. UNDP is ready to work at national, regional, and global levels to build more effective capacities and facilitate the transfer of experiences, including through triangular and South-South co-operation, between communities, countries, and cities.

In closing, let me again thank the Government of Japan for hosting this meeting, and for committing to host the third World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2015.

The discussions over these next two days will help our world move from the achievements of the “Hyogo Decade” to a new vision and action for disaster risk reduction, which will save lives and sustain development even in the most challenging circumstances.