

**Statement by
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On behalf of the UNISDR, I would to thank for the opportunity to make a statement on an issue that is very timely and highly relevant for the work of this Commission, namely the issue of increasing risk and vulnerability to natural hazards. The recent earthquakes in Haiti and Chile and floods in Brazil, just to name the very latest - and related loss of life - have underscored the importance of ensuring that the human built environment is resilient in the face of a number of natural hazards, both seismic and climatic.

Disaster risk is increasing globally, and is highly concentrated in middle- and low-income countries.¹ Increased frequency, intensity and unpredictability of extreme weather events, rising sea-level and temperature, increased societal vulnerabilities, such as stresses on water availability, agriculture and ecosystems is becoming a new reality and making disasters more devastating than ever before. Rapid urbanization and population density in coastlines and seismic zones and destruction of wetlands, mangroves, watersheds and upland forests is intensifying these trends. Over the past 30 years, the number of disasters triggered by natural hazards – storms, floods, earthquakes and droughts – has increased threefold. According to the EMDAT disaster database, 3,852 disasters killed more than 780,000 people over the past ten years, affected more than 2 billion others and cost a minimum of 960 billion US\$. In terms of human losses, Asia is the continent that has been struck again and again by disasters during the last decade, accounting for 85% of fatalities. After earthquakes, storms (22%) and extreme temperatures (11%) were the most deadly hazards between 2000 and 2009. The annual average death toll for the 2000 decade was 78,000, which is considerably higher than the 43,000 of the previous decade (1990s). In addition, disasters are having a high economic impact on affected countries, in particular for developing countries; the smaller the economy – the bigger the relative effect.

The good news is that governments have already started working to reduce vulnerability to natural hazards. In January 2005, governments adopted the Hyogo Framework for Action (2005-2015) Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters, a 10-year action plan to make the world safer from natural hazards. The key areas of action include – risk assessment and early warning, public awareness and education, environmental and urban planning and management, and strengthening the governance and management of risk as well as

¹ UN, 2009 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction, Risk and Poverty in a Changing Climate

improved disaster preparedness. Essentially, what needs to be done is to ensure that new development investments do not increase disaster risk, but would contribute decreasing it.

The potential cost of a disaster in the loss of lives, livelihoods, investments and development gains is a high price to pay compared to often low-cost action to reduce the risk beforehand. At the same time if development is done in the right way, taking into account the needs to reduce disaster risk, as called for by the Hyogo Framework for Action², this could not only reduce the impact of disasters caused by natural hazards significantly, but prove also to be a very wise investment and contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development.

For more information, please visit:

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www.preventionweb.net

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² The *Hyogo Framework for Action (2005-2015): Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters* provides the necessary guidance to reducing risk to disasters. It was adopted by 168 governments at Kobe, Hyogo, Japan in January 2005, just a few weeks after the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami. More information at <www.preventionweb.net>.