

10 October 2001

**Statement of H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo,
President of the 56th Session of the General Assembly,
on the International Day for Disaster Reduction**

World leaders resolved to adopt a new ethic of conservation and stewardship in all environment actions at the Millennium Summit held in September 2000. They also expressed their commitment to protecting the vulnerable and strengthening cooperation to reduce the number and effects of natural and man-made disasters. Against this background, I think it highly appropriate that “Countering Disasters, Targeting Vulnerability” has been chosen as the theme for the World Disaster Reduction Campaign 2001.

Disasters caused by natural hazards such as earthquakes, floods, landslides, droughts, wildfires, tropical cyclones, and volcanic eruptions continue to exact a heavy toll in terms of loss of human life and destruction of infrastructure. Indeed, during the last 20 years, the number of such disasters has increased by 22 % and the number of persons affected by 35%.

In the same period, 61% of these disasters have been linked to global warming and the El Nino/La Nina events. While natural disasters will continue to occur, human intervention can either reduce or increase the vulnerability of societies to these hazards. In that sense, human action is a double-edged sword. For example, measures to reduce poverty can have a synergistic effect in reducing the vulnerability of the poor to natural disasters. Conversely, policies that exacerbate poverty can have the opposite effect.

The international community, including the United Nations, has made strenuous efforts for disaster prevention and mitigation. Building upon the successful implementation of various strategies during the 1990s, the newly adopted International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) aims to increase the resilience of all societies to the effects of natural hazards and associated disasters, thus reducing vulnerability to such phenomena. To achieve our goals, it is vital to enhance public awareness and expand inter-sectoral partnerships, based upon the best available scientific knowledge. The role of public authorities, especially local communities, needs to be further strengthened. Intergovernmental organizations, including the United Nations, should also strive for better cooperation and coordination in support of developing countries that are particularly prone to disasters.

I invite all of you to join the ongoing efforts to reduce natural disasters and the vulnerability to natural disasters. We may never be able to eradicate natural disasters altogether, but we can certainly make our common home – planet earth – more disaster-proof for the benefit of future generations.