



UN World Conference on
Disaster Risk Reduction

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1st Plenary Meeting (AM)

**DISASTER RISK REDUCTION IN 'EVERYBODY'S INTEREST', SAYS SECRETARY-GENERAL,
OPENING THIRD WORLD CONFERENCE**

Prime Minister of Japan Emphasizes Saving Lives by 'Building Back Better'

"Sustainability starts in Sendai," United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon declared at the opening of the Third World Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction in Japan, asserting to the largest-ever high-level meeting on the subject, "this is the first stop on our journey to a new future".

Disaster risk reduction – the front-line defence against climate impacts – "is in everybody's interest, and it is everybody's business," Mr. Ban said, stressing that it was a smart investment for business and a wise investment in saving lives.

On that point, he said the global annual price tag in damage exceeded \$300 billion, and as that number grew, so would the suffering. That figure could be lowered dramatically, with the savings invested in development. In fact, he said, \$6 billion allocated each year could save up to \$360 billion by 2030.

Also crucial was to empower individuals, support communities and back promises with resources, he said, urging help for the poorest and most vulnerable; 9 out of 10 disaster fatalities were in low- and middle-income countries.

Noting the fourth anniversary of the great east Japan earthquake and the present tropical cyclone bearing down on Vanuatu, he said discussions here were "very real" for millions around the world. It was thus imperative to keep a sharp focus on their needs during negotiations on an outcome.

He urged an ambitious Conference outcome, which, he suggested, would put the world on a path to a new sustainable development agenda with new global goals at its core, a universal climate agreement and financing to turn plans into results. Success here would drive momentum for the July conference on financing, the September summit on sustainable development, and the New York-based climate conference.

Rounding out his remarks, Mr. Ban said resilience was not just a matter of strong buildings that could withstand earthquakes; it was the result of strong bonds among countries and communities. He pledged commitment by the United Nations to strengthening those bonds with a unified plan of action.

Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of the host country, recalling the magnitude of the east Japan earthquake, with 20,000 lives lost and much loss of livelihood, said that because his country was disaster prone it had been working hard on disaster risk reduction for a long time. In fact, when Tokyo was built 400

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years ago, the ruler shifted the river to protect the city through an enormous 60-year effort.

Japan, he said, emphasized the importance of "building back better", which meant constantly revising flood management plans, enforcing weirs, constructing channels and conducting disaster education. Those efforts were paying off – 60 years ago, large-scale flooding often cost thousands of lives; now it was rare for a flood to take more than 100 lives. Even during the 2011 earthquake, students knew to evacuate to higher ground through long-time oral tradition. It was now crucial to learn from recent events as well.

In the Third World Conference, current and past experiences from every part of the world would be shared, activities built on the Hyogo Framework would be reviewed, utilization of new technology discussed, effective collaboration strengthened with various stakeholders and a new framework established, passing from the era of Hyogo to Sendai, he said.

Highlighting the impact of the great east Japan earthquake was the Mayor of Sendai, Emiko Okuyama, who noted that nearly 1,000 people had died and more than 20,000 were dead or missing. From that disaster flowed a renewed determination to achieve complete recovery. As difficult as the journey had been, none would ever forget the support, and on behalf of the disaster-affected areas, he expressed his sincerest gratitude.

Sendai's disaster risk reduction efforts that utilized the power of its citizens and communities would be an edifying example for every country and region of the world, she said. In fact, the disaster-affected areas of the Tohoku region were incorporating the lessons learned in Sendai. She hoped those experiences would be reflected in the new international disaster risk reduction strategies formulated here, and that the conference would yield "bountiful fruit".

The President of the Conference, Eriko Yamatani, said that in the 10 years since the adoption of the Hyogo Framework for Action, much progress had been achieved in reducing disaster risk at the local, national, regional and global levels. However, disasters continued to cause enormous loss and damage, including the Tohoku area here that was hit by the great east Japan earthquake four years ago.

Over the next five days, she said, the assembled Heads of State and Government, ministers and officials of varied sectors would be building a framework to better meet such challenges. She invited all participants to contribute to making the event a turning point for disaster risk reduction.

Laurent Fabius, incoming President of the twenty-first session of the Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change said that today's Conference in Sendai and the December climate change conference in Paris addressed two problems that seemed distinct. Those were the reduction of the risk of catastrophes on one side and the fight against climate change on the other.

"In reality, those subjects are completely connected," he said. Today it was estimated that more than 70 per cent of natural disasters were tied to climate change. That was twice as much as 20 years ago. Seventy countries had been identified as particularly vulnerable to extreme climate events – typhoons, floods, sandstorms or snowstorms. Slower processes could have equally devastating effects, including drought and raised ocean levels. Rich countries were not sheltered, and Japan knew that well. It was the poorer countries that were most vulnerable, however, having fewer resources for adaptation.

It was clear, he said, that the negotiations on each issue should not be mixed together as they required their own regimes. But given the connections

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between the issues, the fight against disaster and that against climate change must be conducted together as the solutions were in large part the same. For example, when an alert system for natural catastrophes was put in place, it was also a contribution to adaptation to climate change. When one took into account climate change in the design of buildings or the management of coastal zones, it related to climate change as well.

He called, in that context, for an ambitious agreement to be arrived at in Paris, one that limited global warming to 2°C, or if possible to 1.5°C. "Survival was at stake" not only for small islands, but for many other regions as well, he stressed.

Regina Pritchett, representative of the nine major groups of non-governmental organizations, said it was important to ask what kind of community organizing is going on in every country, because it was likely that a lot was happening. In her experience, she was often impressed by the work done by the most vulnerable – women, youth and the disabled. As an example, she spoke of the Camelia Development Group in Miyagi formed by older women in a temporary settlement following the tsunami and named after a flower that was able to survive such events after a 50-year recovery time. She paid tribute to such women and the partnership of the local government with them.

"We are here as a part of a whole group of people who are working to make the world safer and more resilient," she stressed, adding, "If you can't see the connection, seek it." She expressed hope that the post-2015 framework would facilitate connections between all stakeholders in the process and make disaster risk reduction inclusive, so that "we don't fall victim to the illusion that we in our silos can do this work alone."

In other business this morning, the Conference elected its President and other members of its Bureau, adopted its agenda, other organizational matters, and the rules of procedure, and appointed members of the Credentials Committee.

Following the opening, delegations began a general exchange of views, including addresses by Japanese Prime Minister Abe; Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, President of Turkmenistan; King Mswati III of Swaziland; Emanuel Mori, President of the Federated States of Micronesia; Uhuru Kenyatta, President of Kenya; Baldwin Lonsdale, President of Vanuatu; Al Hadji Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh, President of Gambia; Robert G. Mugabe, President of Zimbabwe; Paul Biya, President of Cameroon; and Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé, President of Togo.

Later in the day, statements by intergovernmental and other organizations were also expected, as well as a high-level multi-stakeholder partnership dialogue titled "Mobilizing women's leadership in disaster risk reduction".

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