



UN World Conference on
Disaster Risk Reduction

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Ministerial Round Tables (AM & PM)

AS MINISTERIAL FORUM OPENS AT SENDAI CONFERENCE, FOCUS TURNS TO RECONSTRUCTION

AFTER DISASTERS, INCREASED INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN POST-2015 FRAMEWORK

Building back better after earthquakes, cyclones and other destructive forces and international cooperation in reducing harm from future crises were the focus of high-level discussions today in Sendai, Japan, as the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction continued.

The Conference, which opened yesterday and runs through 18 March, is reviewing implementation of the 2005 Hyogo Framework for Action for disaster risk reduction – which was developed after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami – and aims to adopt a new framework for the post-2015 period while promoting partnerships to put in place the policies and programmes required.

As of the opening, delegates from 186 United Nations Member States had registered to participate in negotiations on the new framework and to air their views in plenary statements and partnership dialogues and five ministerial round tables, the first two of which were held today.

The round tables provide an opportunity for focused, interactive discussion on specific topics critical to the negotiations. Today's round tables were entitled "Reconstructing after Disasters: Building Back Better" and "International Cooperation in Support of a Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction".

In speaking of both cooperation and building back better, participants stressed the need for a forward-looking perspective to build now the kind of resiliency that would be needed in the future, particularly given the knowledge of the increased severity of certain crises due to climate change and other factors.

Initiatives announced in round tables and other forums today included a "One Billion Coalition for Resilience" to scale up community and civic action by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

Round tables tomorrow, 16 March, will focus on "Governing Disaster Risk: Overcoming Challenges" and "Reducing Disaster Risk in Urban Settings", to be held at 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. respectively, as negotiations on the post-2015 framework continue.

Ministerial Round Table I

The morning's round table, chaired by Numan Kurtulmuş, Deputy Prime Minister of Turkey, was entitled "Reconstructing after Disasters: Building Back Better". It aimed to share experiences of countries and organizations in making nations and communities more resilient by utilizing the opportunity presented by post-disaster rebuilding after a destructive event.

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Opening the discussion, Mr. Kurtulmuş noted that a man-made crisis was being promulgated in Syria, with millions displaced within the country and abroad, many of which were being cared for by the Turkish authorities. Long-term strategies prioritized the empowerment of the refugees themselves so that they would be able to participate in reconstruction of their own country when they returned home. He urged the international community to provide more resources for the effort.

He said that Turkey was exposed to many natural hazards, including seismic events and climate change factors, exacerbated by population growth and urbanization. It was most important to build back with permanent housing, include resilience issues in development plans and standardize infrastructure regulation and insurance processes.

Sustainable infrastructure, he said, must take into account all factors, including secondary hazards that resulted from rapid urbanization. All participants should come up with key recommendations in that context to help shape the post-2015 framework.

In the discussion that followed, speakers noted their country's vulnerability to earthquakes, tsunamis and extreme weather, and described their attempts to build back better in response to such events. Akihiro Ohta, Japan's Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transportation and Tourism, said that it was critical to combine structural and non-structural efforts for recovery. The great Hanshin-Awaji earthquake of 20 years ago and the great east Japan earthquake four years ago triggered a national drive to make buildings more resistant to seismic events.

Public elementary and junior high schools would have undergone complete reinforcement by March of 2016, he said. Standards for road bridges had been improved, buildings fire-proofed and roads widened where wooden housing was densely concentrated. Education on tsunami safety was stepped up, as well as the development of monitoring systems and evacuation routes. He invited participants to see the reconstruction for themselves. The Secretary for the National Economic Development Authority of the Philippines, Arsenio Balisacan, also described the confluence of efforts in many sectors for building back better from that country's recent major typhoon. "We must find the positive aspect of all events," Parliamentary Secretary of Granada Winston Garraway said, describing rebuilding from Hurricane Ivan.

Emphasizing the importance of the private sector in building back better, some participants focused on insuring against risk in a way that allowed such improvements. New Zealand's Minister for Canterbury Earthquake Recovery, Gerry Brownlee, said that some 80 per cent of buildings in his country had been well insured in that context in a centralized manner, utilizing some of the best actuarial expertise from the private sector. Advice from the scientific community was critical in that regard and in rebuilding better in general.

Ólöf Nordal, Minister for Interior of Iceland, and Siaosi Sovaleni, Deputy Prime Minister of Tonga, also stressed the importance of insurance arrangements. The latter noted that building codes and safe construction standards were refined following every cyclone that occurred. Michael Keenan, Minister of Justice of Australia, also spoke of adapting to new threats during rebuilding, describing the addition of wind resilience to building standards after the Darwin cyclone.

Mr. Sovaleni, however, warned against unduly lengthy periods of gathering information following destruction, something he called "death by assessment", and he recommended the creation of assessment-cluster structures to ensure expertise was available, efficient and coherent. George T. Chaponda, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Malawi, also emphasized the

need for quick, effective assessment so that quality housing could be quickly supplied.

Many others underlined the need for providing housing quickly but in a way that provided more resilience, with Thoriq Ibrahim, Minister for Environment and Energy of Maldives, speaking of the experience of his country following the Indian Ocean tsunami.

In the same vein, others spoke of balancing the speed of rebuilding while fitting it into the context of long-term development plans. Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin, Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister, said that a balance was needed between time, sustainability and quality. Traditional techniques were often valuable for both objectives. Nabil El-Jisr, President of Lebanon's Council for Development and Reconstruction, said that the development framework of a country might need to change in the face of major reconstruction, speaking of rebuilding after the destruction wrought by fighting in 2006.

In order for rebuilding to increase the well-being of the population beyond what it was before a disaster, reconstruction efforts in China were combined with economic and social development, Li Ligu, that country's Minister for Civil Affairs, said, with assistance mobilized through all sectors. Local people were heavily involved in all rebuilding efforts. Paraguay's Minister for National Emergencies, Joaquin Roa, also stressing the need to involve local communities, emphasized that such involvement must be universally inclusive, something stressed as well by John Anthony Emmanuel Amaratunga, Minister for Public Order, Disaster Management and Christian Affairs of Sri Lanka.

Sometimes it was impossible to build back in the same place, and land-use planning must be changed to make communities more resistant and sustainable, Mahafaly Solonandrasana Olivier, Minister for the Interior and Decentralization of Madagascar, said. For that reason, roads and other infrastructure must be established quickly with the assistance of development partners.

Richard Brabec, Minister for Environment of the Czech Republic, noted that it was often difficult to move people, however, because of their attachment to locations, in the context of floods that had plagued Prague over the centuries. Major urban infrastructure such as subways could not be moved and required some of the most expensive rebuilding, making it imperative to protect such infrastructure against further events. The representative of the Dominican Republic relayed an experience in moving people in a sustainable manner. He said that civil protections and community empowerment was needed for that purpose.

Describing billions of dollars of assistance to all such efforts, the representative of the World Bank Group said the right policies and decisions must be in place before a disaster strikes, with all actors aware of their respective responsibilities and goals, with actionable and measurable indicators. "We have the choice to use disasters as an opportunity to build back better and reduce future risk," he said.

A representative of the Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), describing the experience of her agency in the Philippines, said that among the major omissions in the Hyogo Framework was addressing resiliency in the context of recovery planning. Her agency was committed to assisting those efforts. She underlined the importance of national planning and capacity and international assistance, including clear and predictable financing mechanisms for resilient recovery, not just for life-saving efforts.

France's Minister for State, Annick Girardin, and Switzerland's State Secretary and Head of Humanitarian Aid, Manuel Bessler, said that for optimal cooperation in risk reduction, building for future risks must happen now. Ms.

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Girardin noted that it was actually cheaper to build well in the first place, particularly in those countries where there was the greatest climate risk. Insurers could play a useful role in that context, she added.

In the face of inevitable climate change, small island representatives spoke of new regulatory regimes that were needed now for adaptation and protection. In that context, Mr. Ibrahim said that disturbance of coral reefs and sand formations had been banned in his country. Enforcement of all relevant regulations was critical, Sartaj Aziz, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, said, noting his country's vulnerability to melting glaciers.

The need for technological transfer to face the more extreme floods and drought due to climate change were emphasized by the Minister for Disaster Management of South Sudan, Awut Deng Acuil. Given rising flood waters during extreme weather, it was critical to prioritize the survival of the most vulnerable, too, M.A. Mannan, Bangladesh's Minister for Finance said.

A representative of Japanese non-governmental organizations said that the building back better approach was relevant to most disasters, but not to nuclear disasters where the myth of improvable safety of nuclear facilities persisted. The continued damages of the Fukushima disaster reinforced that lesson, he maintained.

Also speaking in this morning's discussion were ministers and other officials of the United Arab Emirates, Viet Nam, Kenya, Colombia, Finland, Qatar, Serbia and Algeria.

Ministerial Round Table II

A round table this afternoon, moderated by Rajnath Singh, Minister for Home Affairs of India, focused on the practical challenges facing international cooperation and partnership, which included, among others, differing levels of technical and financial capacity, limited knowledge, the transboundary nature of disaster hazards, and climate change.

Mr. Singh highlighted the situation of small island developing States and least developed and landlocked countries, which, despite best intentions, were unable to cope with disaster challenges if they relied only on their own resources. Rather, those nations required sustained, adequate and predictable support. Developed countries must showcase their best practices and local knowledge. Ways and means of international cooperation among States, regional and global organizations, the United Nations, donors and non-governmental organizations would assist implementation of the post-2015 risk reduction framework.

Against a backdrop of more frequent and more intense natural disasters, with the poorest among the hardest-hit, the discussion among some 35 participants centred on key priorities, commitments and actions in support of the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction as it related to international cooperation.

Throughout the segment, the point was reinforced that managing the risk required political leadership at every level in every country, with the responsibilities shared by all, from central government to their local components, to the public and private sectors, and the international community. National circumstances and assistance with built-in resilience measures were deemed persuasive factors in determining success, which, some argued, also required a people-centric approach.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, Fumio Kishida, said that owing to the various disasters throughout his country's history, it had acquired great

understanding and had been a top donor in the field, leading cooperation internationally by sharing its knowledge and technology. Calling attention to the 2013 typhoon in the Philippines, he noted his country's "immediate and seamless" provision of a series of assistance measures, including the dispatch of a Japanese disaster relief team and humanitarian assistance through non-governmental organizations. As announced by Japan's Prime Minister on 14 March, the country would provide \$4 billion from 2015 to 2018 and train 40,000 Government officials and local leaders to play a significant role in post-disaster building back better.

Disaster risk action, he said, was a universal matter involving all countries, which, themselves, had the primary responsibility to protect their people. The first priority was risk reduction investment based on a long-term perspective, without which sustainable development would fall short of its aims. Global partnership was the second key; assistance was not a "one-way street" from developed to developing countries, and he would never forget the assistance from both categories of nations in its recovery from the great east Japan earthquake. Also necessary was to build an implementation system that involved all stakeholders, and to focus on each individual, especially from the perspectives of those most vulnerable.

Rachel Kyte, Vice President, World Bank Group, said climate and disaster risks were fundamental threats to the organization's ability to help its clients eradicate poverty and build a shared prosperity. In response to a soaring demand, the Bank's portfolio of disaster-related investment had more than doubled in the past five years to almost \$6 billion in 2014. As of July 2014, all of its projects were screened for disaster and climate risks, with those considerations built into country partnership frameworks. The Group was also working to measure the impact of its activities by developing a comprehensive resilience indicator with a strong focus on building the resilience of those most vulnerable. It had to be able to "tell the story" about how assistance was building resilience in years to come. It was working now with more than 400 partners, including the European Union, United Nations, civil society and private-sector organizations for that purpose.

The Russian Federation was preparing an initiative to devise proposals aimed at evolving regional and global anti-crisis networks and forecasting disasters, said Vladimir Puchkov, its Minister for Civil Defence, Emergencies and Natural Disasters. Regional centres, he said, would make it possible to promote large-scale disaster prevention work at the international level. Multilateral cooperation, rapid reaction and good organization would allow it to help those suffering from disasters.

Urging inclusion of the disaster risk reduction perspective into projects in all sectors was a goal of the Japan International Cooperation Agency, said its President, Akihiko Tanaka. As an example, he highlighted the value of building earthquake-resistant schools. The group, known as JICA, sought to mainstream disaster risk reduction, the most important driving force of which was country ownership and leadership. To implement effective and concrete measures, leaders must understand the importance of disaster risk reduction and bring strong political will to boost it.

Thanking the pledge by the Japanese Government to help build the capacity of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, its Director General, Inger Andersen, said nature's infrastructure must not be ignored. It was true that "hard infrastructure and planning" was vital, but so was nature's infrastructure, she said.

On another track, Raed Arafat, Secretary of State, Ministry of Internal Affairs of Romania, said the Ebola epidemic had made clear that the time for

debate was over. He urged that the lessons learned from that situation be the basis for future development of international cooperation.

Desmond Swayne, Minister of State for International Development, United Kingdom, said more efficient and effective use should be made of existing mechanisms for managing disaster risk rather than the creation of new ones, on which "we are unlikely to agree". He also advocated that use be made of integrating that finance need into the main architecture.

Austria had maintained a "culture of risk" on many levels and for many years, said its head of delegation, Michael Staudinger. The country favoured multi-risk management and forward-looking prevention. Furthermore, Austria's approach for managing and reducing disaster risk was not confined to state or local governments, but also a shared responsibility with other actors, such as the private sector, academia and civil society. He maintained that the nexus between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation was indisputable, and acting locally in all places was of utmost concern as the front line of every disaster.

Peoples' lives were directly affected by risk-resilient plans and actions, asserted Fiji's representative, adding that efforts for nations such as his must be complemented by international cooperation. Officials in Fiji did not have the technical capacity to collect data on disasters so as to impact policies for building resilience. Such data gaps made it impossible to learn lessons and reduce the effects of future disasters. A common approach was needed in Fiji to map risk across the board, involving vulnerable groups, and to subsequently develop responsible response plans to build back better and manage risk.

Picking up on the need to address the disaster risk reduction challenge through global action, Christos Stylianides, the European Union's Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, said Sendai and now Vanuatu were reminders of the urgency facing the world community. The Union, as a first response, just released €1 million to Vanuatu to help emergency relief efforts and was sending experts to the field to assess needs. The post-2015 framework should be universal and based on a shared responsibility; it must focus on implementation means for developing countries, both for financial and non-financial issues. Also crucial was to identify new areas for international cooperation, thereby enabling an environment for the much-needed risk-sensitive development.

Turning participants' attention to financial support, the President of the International Federation of the Red Cross, Tadateru Konoe, said the sustainable development goals would not make sense without a building block devoted to risk reduction. In 2009, he noted, pledges were made in the amount of 1 per cent of official development assistance (ODA), but six years later, that promise was "not even half met". There must be coordinated international financial support. Meaningful partners also had growing faith in the public and private sector's outreach ability. Governments should adopt legal framework to make risk reduction regional, national and local priorities. The Federation would continue to provide guidance in that regard, but at the same time, the role of volunteers should be recognized as social capital. There was a need to stand by a principle of collective responsibility, action and accountability by all and for all.

Gyan Chandra Acharya, High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, said that her office faced the impact of disasters disproportionately – they were exposed to more frequent and severe disasters than ever before. Further, they had multiple layers of constraints, which made response more challenging. Disasters hampered poverty eradication and sustainable development. Besides

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loss of life, small island developing States were expected to lose 20 times more capital stock each year to disasters, and least developed countries were equally vulnerable because of their low development indicators. As such, it was important to integrate disaster risk reduction fully into global processes, such as ending poverty and hunger.

Also participating in the high-level discussion were representatives of Bhutan, Brazil, Cambodia, Chile, Cook Islands, Georgia, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Morocco, Netherlands, Republic of Korea, Peru, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Viet Nam.

Additional speakers included representatives of the Green Climate Fund and International Disability Alliance.

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