



UN World Conference on
Disaster Risk Reduction

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Ministerial Round Table (PM)

**AS 'PUBLIC GOODS', EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS FOR REDUCING DISASTER RISK MUST BE FUNDED
BY PUBLIC INVESTMENT, SPEAKERS AGREE, AS SENDAI ROUND TABLE SEGMENT CONCLUDES**

Public investment had substantial strategic, operational and tactical benefits for disaster risk reduction, as it could increase resilience, save lives and accelerate recovery of devastated homes, institutions and infrastructure, the Sendai World Conference heard today during its fifth and final ministerial round table.

Opening the discussion, titled "Public Investment Strategies for Disaster Risk Reduction", was its Chair, Secretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, Raed Arafat, who said the past decade had shown that governance arrangements were significantly shaping progress on disaster risk reduction, particularly in countries' institutional structures; distribution of power and decision-making authority; capacities and resources; and through the engagement of stakeholders across sectors.

Nevertheless, many gaps at the national level remained. However, due to the multidimensional nature of risk, arrangements to mitigate it could no longer be perceived as separate from the larger governance context, he said, adding, "we need to create the right governance mechanisms".

Michel Jarraud, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), said that about 90 per cent of all natural disasters over the last 50 years were either directly caused or seriously aggravated by weather, water and climate extremes. The good news, though, was that it was possible to provide early warnings for all of those events, which helped to save lives and minimize cost.

Early warning systems were an essential and cost-effective component of an integrated national disaster reduction approach, he said, adding that they were "public goods" in all countries, without exception, so they must be financed by public investment. And that investment, he stressed, had "incredibly high" returns for society in building resilience, minimizing loss of life and accelerating recovery.

Along those lines, Marion Williams, Permanent Representative of Barbados to the United Nations in Geneva, said her country's strategy focused on two elements – the hazards themselves and the vulnerability of populations and other national assets. Governments set the tone, providing both the appropriate environment and the necessary resources to reduce risk to "hard" infrastructure and "soft" approaches.

Barbados, she said, similarly saw expenditure for reducing risk as an investment. Informing and warning the general population was vital, and the country was participating in the Caribbean Catastrophe Insurance Risk Association – the first ever multi-country pool providing its members affordable and effective coverage against the grievous consequences of disasters. In the

(more)

final analysis, national Governments had an inherent responsibility to provide significant public investment in disaster risk management.

The islands of Trinidad and Tobago were in a "hurricane belt", declared Carl Alfonso, that country's Minister for National Security. As such, the country was exposed to a wide range of hazards, including earthquakes and thunderstorms, which triggered flooding in low-lying or poorly drained areas and in highly populated areas in close proximity to the coast. Moreover, the islands' coastal and offshore industrial infrastructure and sensitive ecological areas were exposed to marine and coastal threats, including tsunamis and flooding and other effects of sea-level rise induced by climate changes.

The public sector investment programme, he explained, was a budgetary strategic planning tool for the Government to translate its plans into tangible projects. Those initiatives included coastal erosion protection programmes, a drainage project, flood control projects and energy renewal and efficiency pilot projects. It was critical to have measures in place to provide some relief to the citizens when a disaster hit. Regional cooperation was also crucial, and he looked forward to operationalizing a mobile emergency operation centre, a community response team, and communications systems.

Tajikistan was a mountainous country and so it needed a great deal of investment in disaster risk reduction, said the country's Chairman of the National Committee of Emergency Situations and Civil Defense, Khayridin Abdurakhimov. The Government recognized that it was impossible to have sustainable development without reducing vulnerability, and so disaster risk reduction was a priority. In 2010, for example, the Government had adopted a strategy on risk management which recognized that future generations in Tajikistan must live in greater security and development. It was necessary to identify a single disaster risk reduction funding source, for which regional and global-level coordination would be needed.

The coastal country of Ghana suffered flooding and rainstorms leading to homelessness and sometimes loss of life, said Koranteng Abrokwa, Director of that State's National Disaster Management Organization. The country also suffered from epidemics, and its southern region was prone to earthquakes. The Government therefore intended to establish a disaster fund to ensure timely release of money for disaster risk reduction, provide and promote early warning systems, and set up structures for best practices in that regard. It was working with local governments and district assemblies to engage the grassroots level as it built emergency response institutions and medical centres.

Among others participating in the round table were representatives of Bahrain, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Egypt, El Salvador, Fiji, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Madagascar, Myanmar, Niger, Panama, Philippines, South Africa, Tunisia, Uzbekistan, and Viet Nam.

Other participants were the Director of Transport and Disaster Risk Reduction of the Association of Caribbean States, Deputy Secretary-General of the East African Community Secretariat, Director of the Institute of Risk Management and Climate Change of Bogota, Co-Chairman of the Committee on Risk Management of the Keidanren, Nablus Municipal Council representative, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, and a representative of Youth Beyond Disasters.