

NEWS

The Kingston Declaration 2005

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Part I INTRODUCTION

1. On April 26-28, 2005 the Participants of a Regional Review Meeting captioned "Beyond 2004 Events, Lessons for the Caribbean Region", meeting at the Pegasus Hotel, Kingston, Jamaica agreed on recommendations to provide guidance for the Caribbean countries in order to improve their disaster risk management capabilities, by increasing regional cooperation, national planning and community participation initiatives". The recommendations of this meeting are hereby called the Kingston Declaration 2005.

2. The meeting was convened jointly by the Caribbean Disaster and Emergency Response Agency (CDERA) and the UNDP office for Jamaica, with support from other agencies such as UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office, USA's Overseas Federal Disaster Agency (OFDA), and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The meeting was hosted by the Government of Jamaica through its office for Office for Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management (ODPEM)

3. Representation was drawn from governmental , regional and sub-regional agencies and non governmental organisations , as well as other donor organizations and a range of professionals, researchers and teachers from private and public universities and from interested members of the public as well as the media.

Part II LESSONS LEARNT FROM 2004

4. Considering the spate of natural hazard events in 2004 which resulted in casualties of over 6000 and close to US\$ 6 Billion in loss of assets in 8 states, this regional review meeting was an opportunity for countries, regional and international organizations and civil society to document and share their own findings, lessons learnt and identify the best practices in disaster prevention, preparedness and response during the 2004 hurricane season in the Caribbean. These studies suggest that while important steps have been taken to increase disaster preparedness and response coordination, disaster risk has not been significantly reduced in the Caribbean, but rather tends to increase and will increase even further during the coming years and decades. This is due to increasing social, environmental and institutional vulnerability.

5. The 2004 disasters in the Caribbean revealed the limitations of existing early warning systems. While some countries had prompt alert systems and outreach, other meteorological offices were slower to declare the alert with the resulting impacts. Risk management, as part of a gamut of human rights to the protection of life, livelihood and property, is the undeniable and obligatory responsibility of the State. Moreover, common citizens have the duty and obligation to demand protection and to participate actively and decisively in creating the conditions that make this socially and politically feasible.

6. Most of the casualties during the 2004 disasters in the Caribbean occurred in Haiti, where over 5,000 persons died in two separate events (Fonds Verretes, May 2004 and Gonaïves, September 2004). This serves as a stark reminder that the combination of severe environmental degradation and deteriorated governance and security conditions exacerbated the impacts of extreme weather events. While early warning had a limited effect in Haiti, the emergency response and rehabilitation effort was hampered by enduring civil strife and insecurity. This complex emergency serves also as a reminder of the precarious security environment in which emergency operations must take place.

7. Drawing lessons learned from the emergency response, it is clear that some small islands in the region were totally overwhelmed by the scale of the impact, as in the case of Grenada. In most other countries, emergency response was timely and orderly, with shelters and supplies in place in Cayman Islands and the Bahamas. Similarly, other significant relief efforts were supported by donors. However, clear shortcomings were identified in terms of the resilience and continuity of disaster management agencies in severely stricken countries (Grenada and Haiti). The location and design of shelters and Emergency Operations Centers in several countries were deficient, thus exposing

them to unnecessary damages. Relief efforts in several stricken countries were conducted in an ad hoc fashion, with limited applications of existing disaster response plans. Finally, a lack of community empowerment and local participation during the emergency phase limited the reach and effectiveness of national disaster management agencies.

PART III MEETING OBJECTIVES

8. The participants in this Regional Review Meeting were desirous of sharing lessons from disaster events in 2004 in order to learn from experiences of the past with a view to increase existing capacities in the Caribbean to prevent and respond to disasters, by building resilience and providing practical guidelines for plans and actions. The Review Meeting had the following objectives:

- Identify opportunities for improving response planning
- Facilitate a reflection on the Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) Strategy and priority actions under the Intermediate Results (IRs)
- Develop Action Plans for improving risk reduction programmes/policies in the short to medium term
- Identify strategic opportunities for collaborating with other sectors and partners.

9. In order to achieve these objectives, the regional review meeting combined plenary sessions guided by experts from regional institutions, with the setting up of working groups on key topics such as emergency management, health and environment, critical facilities, as well as a donors group. The results of these deliberations were fed into a regional action plan which is now available to aid the planning and response processes for the upcoming hurricane season of 2005 and beyond.

PART IV CONCLUSIONS

10. Considering the global frameworks agreed upon during the Kobe World Conference on the Reduction of Disasters and the Barbados Action Plan +10 Conference- the SIDS Conference celebrated in Mauritius in January 2005, as well as the strategic framework outlined by the Millenium Development Goals (MDG), and bearing in mind the need for the alignment of sub-regional and local action plans within these global frameworks, this Regional Review Meeting reached the following conclusions in order to provide guidance for the Caribbean countries to improve their disaster risk management capabilities, by increasing regional cooperation, national planning and community participation initiatives:

- a. There is a need for a higher level of regional/national/local level coordination for disaster management, with particular emphasis on damages and needs assessments.
- b. There is a need to improve early warning systems to allow for greater level of community participation.
- c. There is a need for standardization of information protocols, in order to ensure effective disaster response.
- d. There is a need to build greater community resilience.
- e. The need for more equitable risk sharing and risk transfer mechanism.
- f. There is a need to better incorporate disaster risk management into development policies and action plans.
- g. There is a need for improvement in the communication systems throughout the entire disaster management spectrum.
- h. There is the need for improvement of regional response mechanisms.
- i. There is a need for greater donor coordination to ensure greater efficiency in disaster prevention, preparedness, mitigation and response.

PART V RECOMMENDATIONS- ACTION PLANS

11. Considering the foregoing, and based on the Intermediate Results (IRs) contemplated in the CDM framework and distinguishing short term measures to be taken prior to the next hurricane season from longer term considerations, the participants to the Regional Review Meeting agreed on the following recommendations.

12. That all parties agreed:

a. To the strengthening of Institutional Capacities for Regional/National/Local Coordination

- By enshrining in law, the roles and responsibilities of all disaster management stakeholders including private sector and civil society

b. To encourage research and training on disaster risk management in the Caribbean by

- Establishing or strengthening as appropriate, permanent capacity for assessing vulnerability and risk, with community participation, writing disaster scenarios and coordinating, monitoring and supervising emergency planning, training and simulation exercises.
- Organizing Disaster Management Fairs throughout the Caribbean region.

• Creating and maintaining a Hazard and Disaster Database.

c. To standardize information gathering and dissemination protocols, to ensure timely response to emergencies, by

- Ensuring the existence of protocols for the collection and dissemination of information to support disaster management planning

- Ensuring that there are coordination centres for the collection and dissemination of disaster management information

d. To improve preparedness, response and mitigation capacities into all public, private and civil society entities by:

- Establishing clear lines of interaction and linkages between national and local with civil societies and the private sector.

- Ensuring that civil societies are represented and integrated at the national and local levels

- Producing a mechanism for the community report card on accountability (for citizens to rate the performance of responders)

e. To encourage the development of risk transfer and risk sharing mechanisms with special focus on communities.

f. To ensuring the mainstreaming of risk management approaches into Environmental and Development Policy by promoting

- The improvement of existing legislations or enacting new legal tools such as National Preparedness Acts, Enforcing Building Codes/Standards, Land Use Planning

g. To improve Coordination between government, non government and donor agencies to promote CDM.

- By ensuring the establishment of proper response plans at all critical facilities under the guidance of the national disaster office.

- By devising protocols and mechanisms that promote compatibility between damage and needs assessments conducted by different organisations in a disaster and the damage and needs assessment conducted by the country affected.

- By advocacy for the creation of a structure that will satisfy the need for a Donor Group in the Western Caribbean

- By establishing a coordinating mechanism by which non governmental organisations work and collaborate with NDOs. This mechanism will incorporate clearly prescribed standards of operation and action.

13. All parties also agreed to the creation of an action plan which outlines deliverables and timelines to support the initiatives outlined.

14. All parties agreed to become actively involved in inviting and encouraging all partners: government and civil society and international agencies to review and develop support mechanisms and to implement plans and actions to achieve the recommendations of this declaration.