

Welcome Remarks by  
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Excellencies, distinguished representatives, dear colleagues. My name is John Ohiorhenuan, Senior Deputy Director of the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) of the United Nations Development Programme. On behalf of Kathleen Cravero, the Assistant Administrator and Director of the Bureau, it is my pleasure to welcome you to this important forum under the aegis of the International Recovery Platform.

It is a great honor for me to be here in Kobe on the occasion of the 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the great Hanshin-Awaji earthquake. We can only imagine the devastation that affected the very area where we now stand, and the efforts that went in to turning disaster into successful recovery. In fact, I would warmly recommend a visit to the nearby earthquake museum giving an opportunity for reflection for both intellect and soul.

Let me start by expressing my deep appreciation to all co-organisers of this event in the IRP family for giving us the opportunity to come together in order to learn from the experience from recent major disasters. In particular, I wish to applaud our friends in the Government of Japan, the Cabinet Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Hyogo Prefecture, as well as our colleagues at the Asian Disaster Reduction Centre (ADRC) and the IRP Secretariat here in Kobe. We believe that this will be an important step to strengthening our collective capacity to turn recovery from disasters into opportunities for risk reduction and resilient development.

As we know, experience increasingly affirms that the post-disaster recovery phase provides a critical opportunity to shift the focus from saving lives to restoring livelihoods. It is also a critical time to introduce measures to reduce future disaster risk. In other words, recovery provides an important window of opportunity to close the gap between relief and development and transform disasters into opportunities for sustainable development.

Experience also shows, however, that to be effective, disaster recovery needs to be an integral part of response planning systems. The necessary legislative and institutional systems as well as recovery personnel and resources must be in place well before a disaster occurs. Furthermore, post-disaster recovery needs to be conceptualised and designed to take account of the underlying causes and risks that provoked the disaster in the first place. This will help avoid recreating conditions of risk and preparing the ground for future disasters.

The tsunami of December 2004 was one of the worst natural disasters in recent history, with more than 275,000 people believed to have died in the five most affected countries. In addition to this immense death toll, we must also consider the full impact of the tsunami on livelihoods, economic activity and individual well-being, particularly for the poorest and most vulnerable sections of the affected communities.

The same is true in relation to the recent earthquakes in Pakistan in October 2005, and in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in May 2006. While the immediate emergency response to these disasters is long over, the governments and affected communities – with the support of the international community - are still working hard to recover fully from the effect of the disasters to their lives, homes, livelihoods, the infrastructure and to the broader fabric of society.

Here, I would like to express particular appreciation to the representatives of the countries affected by these disasters, who have taken the time to join us at this

forum to share their experience. We have the opportunity - and responsibility - to learn from their experience in order to develop our knowledge and understanding of the challenges of recovery and of how we can further increase our capability to prepare for, manage and support such efforts for future disasters.

As I am sure you are aware, UNDP has a very strong commitment to disaster risk reduction and recovery, rooted in the decision of the United Nations General Assembly at its 52<sup>nd</sup> session to assign this responsibility to UNDP. The recent report of the Secretary-General's High Level Panel, *Delivering as One*, further reinforces this mandate by recommending that the United Nations efforts in disaster risk reduction be urgently enhanced and that UNDP take the lead on this issue. The report also recommends that UNDP become the UN leader and coordinator for early recovery. Regardless of what happens to the Report, we are committed to playing this role. Indeed, we are already playing it in the context of the humanitarian reform process, where we lead the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Global Cluster Working Group on Early Recovery.

To us, the International Recovery Platform, established in connection with the World Conference on Disaster Reduction - held right here in Kobe two years ago - provides an important opportunity in this regard. The IRP is a thematic platform within a strengthened International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) system. As such, it gives us the opportunity to work with, and draw upon, the collective knowledge and experience of a broad community of recovery practitioners and policy makers - as we strive towards the fulfillment of the Hyogo Framework for Action. As you all know, the core theme is "Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters". As part of our commitment to the IRP, we are very pleased to co-staff the IRP Secretariat based here in Kobe, together with the Asian Disaster Reduction Centre (ADRC).

Within the context of the IRP, and the IASC Cluster Working Group on Early Recovery, we are also taking forward – in broad partnership with actors in both the

humanitarian and development areas - the development of a Post Disaster Recovery Needs Assessment (PDNA) methodology and toolkit. We have asked the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC) to be our implementing partner in this work in order to make sure that we benefit from their work in the field of Damage and Loss Assessment (DALA).

I want to say that we see the true value of the PDNA as a tool, not only for the use of international responders to disaster, but also for building national capacities - particularly in high risk countries - through a process that recognizes national specificities, and integrates existing national methodologies. Linked to this and together with our friends in the International Labor Organisation, we are also taking forward a pre-disaster recovery planning initiative within the context of the IRP.

As you must have gathered from what I have said, we are certainly very pleased to participate in and contribute to the work of the IRP together with our partners in national governments and the international community – including, of course, our sister UN programmes and agencies, the World Bank, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Federation as well as the broader international community, civil society and the private sector. IRP is still a relatively “new kid on the block”. We hope that we will see the participation in the IRP grow as we know that there is a broad community “out there” with important contributions to make to this effort. By working together, we can ensure that we take account of the broadest possible experience in creating synergies when we build capacities to reduce vulnerability to disasters, before they happen and also when recovering from their effects.

If I may end where I started, I would like, again, to welcome you to this important forum. I look forward to a very active discussion and exchange of experience which I hope will feed into the development of innovative approaches and new partnerships for the effective implementation of the Hyogo framework for action.

Thank you.

