



2nd Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction

7-8 November 2007

High-level Round Table 2

Promoting Regional Cooperation Mechanisms on Disaster Reduction

Background Note

Asia is the largest and most populous continent of the world. It covers 29.4% of the earth's total land area, more than 60% of the world population and contributes 40 % of its wealth. The continent has a large number of countries characterized by a wide range of geographical, geological and climatic features, which create various types of natural hazards at regular intervals. Many of these hazards turn into disasters causing enormous loss of life and property and unaccountable sufferings of people, particularly the poor and other vulnerable sections of society. Rapid growth of population, unplanned settlements, unsafe building practices and erratic climatic conditions have compounded the frequency and magnitude of natural disasters in Asia.

Most of the natural hazards in Asia are regional in nature. The geological, hydro-meteorological, climatic or anthropogenic factors that cause these hazards transcend the political boundaries of the countries and affect several countries simultaneously. Indian Ocean Tsunami for example, affected as many as eight countries in South and South East Asia. The South Asian earthquake of October 2005 damaged life and property over large areas of Pakistan and India. The typhoons of Pacific Island affect a number of island countries at the same time. Therefore regional cooperation among countries of the region is very crucial for disaster risk reduction in Asia.

The *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters* which was adopted at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2005 at Kobe, Japan emphasized the

importance of regional cooperation for disaster risk reduction. Paragraph 31 of the HFA which deals with regional organizations read as under:

Regional organizations with a role related to disaster risk reduction are called upon to undertake the following tasks within their mandates, priorities and resources:

(a) Promote regional programmes, including programmes for technical cooperation, capacity development, the development of methodologies and standards for hazard and vulnerability monitoring and assessment, the sharing of information and effective mobilization of resources, in view of supporting national and regional efforts to achieve the objectives of this Framework for Action;

(b) Undertake and publish regional and sub-regional baseline assessments of the disaster risk reduction status, according to the needs identified and in line with their mandates;

(c) Coordinate and publish periodic reviews on progress in the region and on impediments and support needs, and assist countries, as requested, in the preparation of periodic national summaries of their programmes and progress;

(d) Establish or strengthen existing specialized regional collaborative centers, as appropriate, to undertake research, training, education and capacity building in the field of disaster risk reduction;

(e) Support the development of regional mechanisms and capacities for early warning to disasters, including for tsunami.”

In the context of Asia, regional cooperation can take place on three different tracks. First, at the political level commitments for disaster risk reduction can be made on a Pan Asian platform, which will convey the message from more than half of the humanity to the global community. Biennial Asian Conference on Disaster reduction provides such a platform for reiterating such commitments. Second, a few developed countries in Asia have been providing technical and financial assistance on a bi-lateral and regional plane to other countries across the different sub-regions which have been very crucial and should be continued. Some of the emerging economies should also consider extending such cooperation and assistance. However, specific and focused regional

cooperation in Asia has to take place on a more compact sub-regional basis that have common geo-physical, geo-climatic and geo-political features. Asian countries are divided in six such distinct sub-regions:

- A. East Asia
- B. South East Asia
- C. South Asia
- D. Central Asia
- E. West Asia
- F. Pacific Island countries

Each of these regions has its own regional associations for enhancing cooperation among the member countries on a range of issues. Disaster risk reduction is already identified on of the important areas of such cooperation.

Many of these regions have developed their own frameworks, systems, networks and institutions for disaster risk reduction. The Pacific Islands region has developed its Framework for Action 2005-2015 entitled *An Investment for Sustainable Development in Pacific Island Countries*. The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) adopted the *ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response*. Various Government and Non-Government stakeholders of South Asia met in New Delhi in July 2006 and adopted a *Delhi Declaration on South Asian regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction*. The South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has adopted a *Comprehensive Framework of Disaster Management*. The *SAARC Disaster Management Centre* has been set up in New Delhi. The East Asia Summit has identified disaster risk reduction as one of the activities of cooperation among the member countries.

A number of United Nations agencies, international organizations and international financial institutions have been working on regional or sub-regional basis to address specific sectoral issues of disaster risk reduction and emergency management. UN ISDR which the coordinating agency of the UN system for disaster risk reduction has a regional office for the Asia-Pacific with a sub-office in the Middle East.

The Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC) which has been working for disaster risk reduction in a number of Asian countries have the status of an affiliate organization of the United Nations, with regular contributions from the member countries of the region. The Asian Disaster Reduction Centre (ADRC) in Kobe Japan is mainly sponsored

by the Japanese government, but many Asian countries are contributing members. The International Center for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) in Nepal and the South Pacific Applied Geosciences Commission (SOPAC) are the other important institutions of regional cooperation that are working on important issues of natural hazards and social and economic vulnerabilities of the region.

A number of networking organizations of NGOs have also come up such as Asian Disaster Risk Reduction Network, Duryog Nivaran etc which are playing important role in coordinating the activities of civil society organizations and creating awareness and policy advocacy for disaster risk reduction in the region

All these are significant initiatives that have the potential to further strengthen and enhance the regional and sub-regional cooperation for reducing the risks of disasters in Asia. Each of these initiatives are also facing many constraints and challenges which have to be overcome with proactive involvement and cooperation among the countries of the region and the sub-region.

This High Level Panel provides a platform and an opportunity to discuss these issues threadbare and to arrive at certain decisions for enhancing regional and sub-regional cooperation on disaster risk reduction in Asia.