



THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

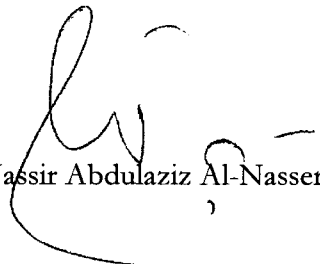
12 March 2012

Excellency,

As the international community approaches the Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in June 2012, there is a growing awareness and commitment to address the world's increasing vulnerability and exposure to disaster risk. In order to support and advance dialogue already underway on how best to integrate the disaster risk reduction approach into Rio+20 outcomes, I will convene a thematic debate on Disaster Risk Reduction. This meeting will be held on 12 April, 2012 at Conference Room 2 (NLB), UN Headquarters, New York.

I am pleased to share with you the latest concept paper and draft programme of the thematic debate for your reference. A detailed programme of the event will follow in due time, and will be available at a later stage on the website of the President of the General Assembly.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.



Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York

THEMATIC DEBATE
DISASTER RISK REDUCTION
12 April 2012 – New York

BACKGROUND

Commitment to address the world's increasing vulnerability and exposure to disaster risk arises from a clear acknowledgment that the impact of climate change is resulting in more frequent, intense and geographically distributed hazards and that the world's increasing urbanization is concentrating economic and physical risk in densely populated cities. This in turn can have a devastating sequential and collateral impact with far reaching environmental, economic and social consequences, as seen in Japan following the Great Eastern Japan earthquake and tsunami, in Haiti following the devastating earthquake, and in Bangkok following the mega floods.

Disaster risk is increasing globally. Over the past decade, water and weather-related disasters, such as floods and storms affected most people, caused the greatest economic losses and represented more than 80 per cent of all disaster events. However, earthquakes are the deadliest disasters in most continents, with drought remaining the biggest killer in Africa. Development efforts are increasingly at risk. Underlying risk drivers, such as poor urban governance, lack of proper urban planning and land management, vulnerable rural livelihoods, declining ecosystems, and climate change underpin the expansion of disaster risk.

In this context, much of the risk is associated with public investment decisions, which are shaped through a number of development planning processes that include land-use planning and management, sector investment planning, ecosystem management, as well as public and private investment. Factoring and applying disaster risk into public investment decisions directly addresses critical risk drivers and downplays potential disaster-related losses and costs at a scale impossible to achieve through stand-alone disaster risk management. Through the application of disaster risk reduction, quality and sustainability of public spending is enhanced and further contributes to social and economic development and building resilience.

For Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs), the need to reduce disaster risk through adaptation to climate change and strengthening early warning systems forms a significant part of their national response, particularly given the often limited economic base (fisheries, tourism and single crops) and their high degree of overall exposure to disasters.

Disasters in Africa pose a major obstacle to the African continent's efforts to achieve sustainable development, especially in view of the region's insufficient capacities to predict, monitor, deal with and mitigate disasters. Reducing the vulnerability of the African people to hazards is a necessary element of poverty reduction strategies, including efforts to protect past development gains.

As stated in the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building resilience of nations, cities, and communities to disasters, disaster risk reduction is intrinsically part of sustainable development as it is about addressing the underlying risks to development, reducing vulnerability and thereby increasing resilience of nations, cities, and communities. This requires community action. To achieve this, public education on sustainable development broadly, and disaster risk reduction specifically, needs to be supported as a key instrument of accountability.

It is also worth noting that gender relations clearly play a role in the political economy of disaster, organizational relief and response, community leadership and mobilization, household preparation and family recovery and survival strategies in disaster-resilient communities. Specific guidelines for integrating gender issues into the preparedness activities for disaster planning as well as for ensuring provision of gender-fair assistance are necessary.

Experiences from countries have shown that disaster risk reduction is most cost-effective when it is integrated from the beginning of the process, including in adaptation. In the context of development there are significant

opportunities for all Member States to address risk through a new institutional framework for sustainable development.

OBJECTIVE

The preparatory process of Rio+20 has identified 'disaster risk reduction and resilience' as one of the emerging issues in the context of sustainable development. This coincides with the growing desire of Member States to increase dialogue on innovative solutions to address the challenge of disaster risk. Against this background, it is very timely to hold an informal thematic debate on addressing disaster risk through public investment decisions.

The overall objective is to support and advance the dialogue already underway on how best to integrate the disaster risk reduction approach into the Rio+20 outcomes.

Building on the Hyogo Framework for Action (and its Mid-Term Review 2011), the outcome document of the High-level Review Meeting on the Implementation of the Mauritius Strategy, the Fourth United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries, and the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, and in reference to the ongoing preparations for the Rio+20 Conference, the intended outcome of the dialogue are to strengthen understanding of how urban risk reduction through public investment contributes to urban resilience, and what opportunities are available through private sector engagement, and to explore opportunities to advance sustainable development through adaptation in the context of Africa, SIDS, LDCs, and other high-risk countries.

The outcome of the thematic debate, a President's Summary, will inform and contribute to the Rio+20 process.

TENTATIVE PROGRAMME

Thematic debate will take place on Thursday, 12 April 2012 at Conference Room 2 (NLB), UN Headquarters, New York. The meeting will consist of opening and closing sessions, two interactive panel discussions, and a lunch-time session.

SESSION I (MORNING): ADDRESSING URBAN RISK THROUGH PUBLIC INVESTMENT

No country is immune from the risk of a disaster, regardless of the level of economic and social development. With over 50% of the world's population now living in cities, there is a critical need to look at how urban risk is managed and reduced, in spite of increasing pressures, through sustainable development mechanisms.

SESSION II (AFTERNOON): INCREASING RESILIENCE TO DISASTERS THROUGH CLIMATE ADAPTATION & RISK REDUCTION

For Africa, SIDS, LDCs, and other high-risk countries an immediate development priority is to increase resilience to disasters through adaptation. Addressing these challenges within a sustainable development agenda secures necessary investment while reducing exposure to disaster risk.

LUNCH-TIME PANEL DISCUSSION: COMPREHENSIVE APPROACHES TO EMERGENCIES

Lunch-time panel will look at the links between disaster risk reduction and humanitarian response. The best practical example that combines resilience, early action, preparedness, humanitarian response, and sustainability issue is the response to the current crisis in Sahel, which will be used as a case study.

During the panel, an announcement will be made on the upcoming launch of a book that deals with disasters in an era of diminishing resources, with the foreword by the President of the General Assembly. The contributors include many prominent experts in the field.

Following presentations by the panellists, the floor will be open to delegates and other participants to pose questions and to share their experience and perspectives. Delegations are encouraged to engage in an open and interactive discussion. There will be no established list of speakers, and delegations are kindly asked to limit their interventions to a maximum of 3 minutes.

TIME	PROGRAMME
10am – 11am	<p><i>Opening Remarks:</i></p> <p>H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the General Assembly H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General [tbc]</p>
11am – 1 pm	<p><i>Interactive Panel Discussion I: Addressing urban risk through public investment</i></p> <p>Moderated by Ms. Margareta Wahlstrom, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction</p> <p>Introduction: Understanding urban risk today and projections for tomorrow</p> <p>High-level expert addressing each of the following sub-themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Making cities resilient ▪ Strengthening innovative partnerships: increasing private sector engagement ▪ Urbanization and environmental emergencies ▪ Utilizing governance and urban planning tools for effecting sustainable change
1:15pm – 2:30pm	<p><i>Panel: Comprehensive Approaches to Emergencies</i></p> <p>Moderated by Ms. Valerie Amos, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs [tbc]</p>
3pm – 5:30pm	<p><i>Interactive Panel Discussion II: Increasing resilience to disasters through climate adaptation and risk reduction</i></p> <p>Moderator [tba]</p> <p>Introduction: Addressing the risk reality in vulnerable countries</p> <p>High-level expert addressing each of the following sub-themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The blue economy: economic opportunities through climate adaptation ▪ Applying ecosystem-based approaches for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation ▪ From legislation to action: implementing effective risk reduction policies ▪ Building resilience through innovative risk management
5:30pm – 6pm	<p><i>Summary:</i></p> <p>Ms. Margareta Wahlstrom, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction</p> <p><i>Closing Remarks:</i></p> <p>H.E. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the General Assembly</p>