




THE PRESIDENT  
OF THE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

09 April 2012

Excellency,

In reference to my letter dated 12 March 2012 informing you of the informal thematic debate on Disaster Risk Reduction, to be held on 12 April 2012 in Conference Room 2 (NLB), UN Headquarters, New York, I am pleased to share with you the attached concept paper and detailed programme. Updated information about the event will be available 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 and three interactive panel discussions (morning, afternoon and a side-event).

### **MORNING SESSION: 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.*

### **SIDE-EVENT: COMPREHENSIVE ACTION TO SUSTAINABLY REDUCE VULNERABILITIES**

*This panel session will look at the links between disaster risk reduction and humanitarian response. The best recent 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.*

\* Lunch will be provided by the Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations.

**AFTERNOON SESSION: 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.*

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	THEMATIC DEBATE ON DISASTER RISK REDUCTION – PROGRAMME
<p>10am – 10:45am</p> <p>CR2 (NLB)</p>	<p><b>Opening Session:</b></p> <p>H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the General Assembly  Ms. Susana Malcorra, Under-Secretary-General, Chef de Cabinet of the United Nations Secretary-General (<i>delivering remarks on behalf of the Secretary-General</i>)  H.E. Mr. Willem Rampangilei, Deputy Coordinating Minister for People’s Welfare, Republic of Indonesia (<i>delivering remarks on behalf of H.E. Mr. Susilo Bambang Yudhovono, President of Indonesia, United Nations Global Champion for Disaster Risk Reduction</i>)  Senator The Hon. Bob Carr, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Australia (<i>delivering remarks on behalf of the Group of Friends of Disaster Risk Reduction</i>)  H.E. Mr. Joe Nakano, Parliamentary Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan</p>
<p>10:45am – 1 pm</p> <p>CR2 (NLB)</p>	<p><b>Interactive Panel Discussion I: Addressing urban risk through public investment</b></p> <p>Moderated by Ms. Margareta Wahlström, 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"> <li>▪ Making cities resilient <i>Dr. Augusto Barrera, Mayor of Quito (Ecuador)</i></li> <li>▪ Strengthening innovative partnerships: increasing private sector engagement <i>Mr. Gary Lawrence, Corporate V.P. and Chief Sustainability Officer, AECOM (USA)</i></li> <li>▪ Urbanization and environmental emergencies <i>Dr. Fumihiko Imamura, Professor of Tsunami Engineering, Tohoku University (Japan)</i></li> <li>▪ Utilizing governance tools for effecting sustainable change <i>Mr. K. Gokhan Elgin, Director, ISMEP Project, Istanbul Governorship (Turkey)</i></li> <li>▪ Building political commitment to address disaster risk in the face of rapid urbanization, and the challenges associated with environmental degradation, urban poverty and inequity <i>Ms. Aisa Kirabo Kacyira, Deputy Executive Director, UN-Habitat</i></li> <li>▪ Mapping of global Disaster Risk Reduction integration into education curricula <i>Mr. David Selby, Founding Director, Sustainability Frontiers</i></li> </ul>
<p>1:15pm – 2:30pm</p> <p>CR2 (NLB)</p>	<p><b>Side-Event: Comprehensive Action to Sustainably Reduce Vulnerabilities</b></p> <p>Moderated by Khaled Mansour, Director of Communications, UNICEF</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Advancing an integrated humanitarian and development approach in building the resilience of communities <i>Ms. Valerie Amos, UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs</i></li> <li>▪ Lessons-learned and national and regional initiatives: providing timely and appropriate assistance <i>H.E. Mr. Ahmed Ould Teguedi, Permanent Representative of Mauritania to the United Nations</i></li> <li>▪ Global overview and trends on Food Security and Nutrition <i>Mr. David Nabarro, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Food Security and Nutrition [tbc]</i></li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Operational perspectives: working with communities <i>Mr. Mohamad Ashmawey, CEO, Islamic Relief</i></li> <li>▪ Spending where it counts: strategic investments to reduce vulnerabilities <i>Mr. Jan Kellet, Researcher, Global Humanitarian Assistance/Development Initiatives</i></li> <li>▪ Announcement on the launch of the book “More With Less: Disasters in an Era of Diminishing Resources” <i>Dr. Kevin M. Cahill, Senior Advisor on Humanitarian Issues and Public Health to the President of the General Assembly</i></li> </ul> <p>Lunch will be provided by the Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations</p>		
3pm – 5:30pm CR2 (NLB)	<p><b><i>Interactive Panel Discussion II: Increasing resilience to disasters through climate adaptation and risk reduction</i></b></p> <p>Moderated by Ms. Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction</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"> <li>▪ The blue economy: economic opportunities through climate adaptation <i>Dr. Angus Friday, Senior International Climate Policy Specialist (World Bank)</i></li> <li>▪ Evidence-based decision making: using scientific knowledge in risk reduction and climate adaptation planning <i>Dr. Barbara Carby, Director of the UWI Disaster Risk Reduction</i></li> <li>▪ Applying ecosystem-based approaches for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation <i>Mr. Ibrahim Thiaw, Division Director, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)</i></li> <li>▪ From legislation to action: implementing effective risk reduction policies <i>Hon. Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Member of the Parliament (Bangladesh)</i></li> <li>▪ Building resilience through innovative risk management <i>Dr. John Schneider, Group Leader, International Geoscience (Australia)</i></li> <li>▪ Addressing desertification, land degradation and drought to better strengthen reliance and reduce vulnerability of disaster-prone communities <i>Mr. Melchiade Bukuru, Chief, UNCCD Liaison Office [tbc]</i></li> </ul>		
5:30pm – 6pm CR2 (NLB)	<p><b><i>Summary:</i></b></p> <p>Ms. Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction</p> <p><b><i>Closing Remarks:</i></b></p> <p>H.E. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the General Assembly</p>		
6:00pm – 8pm Ambassadors River View (NLB)	<p><b><i>Cocktail Reception</i></b></p> <p>Hosted by the Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations and Permanent Mission of the Republic of Indonesia to the United Nations</p>		