

Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2003

Opening remarks

Mr. Toshizo IDO, Governor of Hyogo Prefecture

Dear Minister,
Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of Hyogo Prefecture, I would like to extend my sincere congratulations and cordial welcome at the opening of the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2003 being held here in Hyogo to all of you. I would like to take this opportunity to thank, in particular, Mr. Kounoike, Minister of State for Disaster Management and Mr. Salvano Briceno, Director of United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction for participating in this important event.

Tomorrow will mark eight years since the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. On this occasion of the eighth anniversary, I profoundly feel that it is meaningful to gather the results and challenges brought by disaster reduction activities around Asian region and to convene this conference aiming at contributing to a new international strategy for disaster reduction in the 21st Century.

Eight years back from today, this area experienced devastating damages from the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake which struck the communities populated by a large proportion of elderly people. With the warm support of many people from Japan and overseas, we have put forth our best efforts to recover and restore our lives. I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to those who supported the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the area.

We have successfully rebuilt the area's infrastructure to more than its pre-earthquake level and the population has also returned last November to that of the time before the disaster. The fact that the inland earthquake hit the aging society still leaves tasks to be resolved even after eight years. We have been working on the rehabilitation of elderly people and on urban planning by promoting the redevelopment of urban areas and the plot adjustment operation. However, it is becoming more important to regain vitality of the whole region, including the communities affected by the earthquake, which is closely related to the recovery from the economic recession of Japan.

Despite the hardship, I believe that we could succeed in starting several new initiatives towards building safer communities in the 21st Century, such as the promotion of volunteer and NPO activities for disaster reduction, community based activities to reconstruct the city, and the setting-up of new styles of housing. In this connection, I would like to say that our efforts during the past eight years have been a pioneering and insightful work for the future.

From the perspective of disaster management and recovery, we have accumulated experiences and would like to convey this message to the rest of the world. With this in mind, we have promoted the establishment of “The Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake Memorial: Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution” (DRI) with the support of the national government. I am pleased to inform you that it was inaugurated in the Kobe New Eastern City Center area, Hyogo Prefecture last April. DRI collects and preserves documents and materials regarding the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake and serves as a museum. It also develops human resources trained to deal with recovery and reconstruction and conducts comprehensive research and study as well as promotes cooperation and networking with other international organizations. The area, where DRI is located, fosters international organizations involved in issues related to disasters, development, environment, welfare and health, such as OCHA, UNCRD, ADRC, WHO. I am looking forward to their further efforts in contributing to disaster reduction activities worldwide and would like to support them in an active manner.

I wish to reiterate that hosting the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2003 in Kobe, which was affected by the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, has a special significance for the people of Hyogo Prefecture. In Japan, there is a saying that “a disaster will hit you when you have forgotten about it”. Kobe was indeed hit by a sudden and devastating disaster eight years ago. It is said that the Tokai Earthquake, East Nankai Earthquake and Nankai Earthquake will hit Japan in 30 to 50 years and we must not forget to be prepared for future possible disasters. Asia has been constantly affected by various disasters and it is crucial to introduce drastic countermeasures. I believe that an active discussion will take place during the Conference and that its outcome will contribute greatly to promoting effective disaster reduction activities in Asia. Lastly, I would like to wish all of you great success of the Conference.