

Opening Speech

M. Jarraud

**Secretary-General
World Meteorological Organization**

**Mr Chairman,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On behalf of Mr. Michel Jarraud, the Secretary General of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), it is my pleasure to deliver to you WMO's message on the occasion of the opening of the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2007. I would like to congratulate the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Government of Japan, the Asian Disaster Reduction Center (ADRC), the United Nations Inter-Agency Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR), and the United Nations Development Programme for hosting and co-organizing this event.

Every year disasters produce considerable impacts on life, livelihood and property, retarding socio-economic development by years, if not decades, particularly in the developing countries, which are the most vulnerable. Recent statistics from the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters reveal that between 1980 and 2005, nearly 7500 natural disasters worldwide have taken the lives of over 2 million people and produced economic losses over 1200 billion US dollars. Of this total, 2500 events affected the ADRC Member countries, and have taken the lives of nearly 1 million people and produced economic losses over 450 billion US dollars. In these countries, nearly 90 per cent of the events and 65 per cent of the impacts in terms of casualties and economic losses are due to weather-, climate- or water-related hazards such as floods, windstorms, tropical cyclones and storm surges, droughts, extreme temperatures, land slides, wild fires or by health epidemics and insect infestations directly linked to the meteorological and hydrological conditions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the years, WMO has been promoting the importance of prevention and preparedness measures, including sectoral planning, risk management, early warning systems and emergency preparedness, to reduce the impacts of weather-, climate- and water- related hazards. Through the coordinated networks of the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) of its 188 Members, WMO supports the provision of a wide range of products and services based on observations, monitoring, hazard analysis, forecasting and warnings. On the global scale, it is significant to note that while the number of these disasters and the associated economic losses have increased steadily from the 1950's to 2005, the reported loss of life has decreased by a factor of 10, demonstrating that early warnings combined with emergency preparedness and response planning can indeed significantly contribute to saving lives.

The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 (HFA) has provided an excellent structure for cooperation at all levels. WMO adopted it for its cooperation activities with partners, from the ISDR system and others, to ensure that operational meteorological, hydrological and climate services will be further strengthened and integrated within the disaster risk reduction decision processes in all countries, particularly in those with least resources. I am therefore pleased to note that the “Beijing Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction in Asia” was adopted in 2005, building upon the high international attention in the aftermaths of the World Conference for Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan. This plan has already proven its efficiency for stimulating and strengthening implementation of HFA in the region.

Indeed, numerous capacity-related issues still remain to be addressed in many countries, as also reported by the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2006 in Seoul. Further investments are needed to modernize the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs), to ensure they can fully assume their roles and responsibilities, as contemplated within national disaster risk reduction plans.

Strengthened regional cooperation is also a critical part of the solution to make accessible the latest hazard analysis and forecasting information. In all regions, WMO has promoted strong regional cooperation among its Members in terms of meteorological, hydrological and climate services. WMO facilitates information and capacity building through its Regional Training Centres, Drought Monitoring Centres and 6 Regional Tropical Cyclone Specialized Centres, as well as other Specialized Meteorological Centres. In this regard, I am pleased to note the strong cooperation between WMO/United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Typhoon Committee and WMO/ESCAP Panel on Tropical Cyclones, which has enabled several critical development related to disaster risk management in the region.

In May 2007, the Fifteenth World Meteorological Congress endorsed disaster risk reduction as one of WMO's highest priorities and sanctioned the WMO Disaster Risk Reduction Action Plan, aimed at further reducing the loss of lives, livelihoods and property due to weather-, water- and climate-related hazards around the world. The WMO Congress strongly endorsed its strategic priorities founded on the basis of HFA Priorities for Action falling directly under the mandate of WMO.

The WMO Disaster Risk Reduction Action Plan is focused on:

- Modernizing the NMHSs as required;
- Strengthening operational early warning systems within a multi-hazard approach;
- Developing capacities for hazard analysis and risk assessment;
- Strengthening cooperation of NMHSs with civil protection and disaster risk management agencies;
- Enhancing public awareness about hydro-meteorological hazards; and,
- Planning for the sustainability of these capacities over time.

Several national and regional projects have been initiated in nearly 30 countries of Africa, South-Eastern Europe, Asia, and Central America, and other initiatives are already underway. WMO is committed to working actively with all partner organizations such as the World Bank, UNDP, UNESCO and its IOC, WHO and FAO. Additionally, WMO is establishing a number of new bilateral and multi-lateral partnerships with regional agencies such as ADRC, ADPC, among others.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In closing WMO's message to the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2007, I wish to thank you for your presence, which is a true testimony of your deep commitment to disaster risk reduction activities. Together we are working for a safer world.

Thank you.