

Opening Speech

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Dear ladies and gentlemen!

Let me thank you for participation in the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2007 and congratulate you on the beginning of work.

The Conference is a good opportunity and a tool to continue dialogue and exchange experience in improvement of management and prevention of natural disaster risks, as well as mitigation of consequences, by maintaining better preparedness.

I shall note, that today's meeting has been carefully planned and is a logical continuation of the Second World conference on natural disaster risk reduction, held in the beginning of 2005 in Kobe, Japan. Then, as you know, two major documents – the Hyogo Declaration and the Framework Action Plan till 2015 year were adopted.

These documents define necessary measures, which should be undertaken during the next 10 years, in order to reduce negative consequences of natural disasters, such as human casualties, loss of natural resources, and damage of social and economic infrastructure. The main idea of the Hyogo Declaration and of the Framework Action Plan is to emphasize the need to employ activities on disaster risk reduction in all spheres, in order to ensure sustainability of development.

Central Asia is a highly disaster prone region and suffer each year from sustainable losses due to disasters. According to the Directorate-General for Humanitarian Aid (ECHO), natural disasters, including landslides, floods and earthquakes, have killed about 2,500 persons and affected approximately 5.5 million others (almost 10 percent of the total population) in Central Asia over the last decade. Landslides and floods are continuous threats in addition to facing a potential risk of a large scale seismic disaster. Central Asia is placed in the seismic belt, and Geohazard International estimate approximately 40% probability that a large earthquake with a magnitude up to 9-9.5 on MSK 64 scale will hit the region in the coming 20 years.

Because of variety of natural and geological conditions, the territory of Kazakhstan also is subject to the majority of disasters, known for mankind, among

them high waters, flows, snow avalanches, landslips and landslides, droughts and sharp downturn of temperature of air, blizzards and hurricanes, wood and steppe fires. For example, in 2005 for republic were characterized by a number of large spontaneous natural disasters, connected to high waters, plentiful snow and rainy deposits.

The high number of casualties in Central Asia is not untypical, as the statistics show that ninety percent of global deaths as result from disasters occur in developing countries. Generally speaking the poor are more vulnerable to disasters as poverty limits the capacity to take preventive measures and overcome the losses. Research indicates that social, economical, environmental and physical vulnerability are all factors contributing to greater risk in hazard situations. In a disaster prone region like Central Asia, risk reduction is a crucial factor to obtain poverty reduction and sustainable development. More over, effective disaster prevention strategies would not only save millions of dollars, but also lives.

Natural disaster risk is intimately connected to processes of human development. Disasters put development at risk. At the same time, the development choices made by individuals, communities and nations can generate new disaster risk. But this need not be the case. Human development can also contribute to a serious reduction in disaster risk.

We should ascertain that we are compelled to live in condition of a risk of a danger, caused by nature. However, it does not mean our helplessness - competent and timely preventive measures might ensure preparedness for disasters and mitigate their consequences. Though, natural risks remain to be a part of our world, human decisions and actions can play a major role in preventing them from growing to catastrophes in future.

One of paramount goals of the United Nations Development Programme is to raise awareness of states and communities, especially, in the field of natural disaster risks and accessible means, which allow reducing risks, leading to accidents. At the same time, protection of population and territories of countries in emergency situations are major problems of national state policy in the field of security and achievement of sustainable development.

United Nations Development Programme has shown assistance to the Government of Kazakhstan since 1998, in the field of preparedness for natural disasters, by means of several projects with total budget, for today, of more than half million of US dollars.

The Plan for Natural Disaster preparedness in Kazakhstan was developed with UNDP support in 2000, and the Report on "Lessons from Lugovskoe Earthquake of 23 May 2003" was prepared. And during last two years UNDP has been implementing the project - "Local Risk Management in earthquake zones of Kazakhstan". Executive Agency of this Project is the Ministry of Emergency

Situations of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Responsible partner is the Red Crescent Society in Kazakhstan and the results of the project will be presented here, at the Conference. The project aims to support Kazakhstan in the field of strengthening potential of local population and its participation in early warning and preparations for earthquakes, to improve training of local population, in terms of knowledge and skills, necessary for effective reduction of consequences, in cases of natural disasters. We hope that the implementation of this project can serve a good example for other Central-Asian countries.

The present Conference, undoubtedly, should become a good opportunity to join efforts of representatives of national governments, UNDP and other international organizations, with the purpose to encourage further, steady cooperation and coordination of preparedness and subsequent measures of response.

With a view to ensure progress, actions of governments should be harmoniously agreed with practical efforts of nongovernmental and public organizations, scientific circles and other interested parties. In this way, the undertaken actions will depend on execution of political documents, which define achievement of the final goal - to enhance sustainability of states and communities in responding natural disasters.

Let me thank you all, once again, for your participation in the Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction, which UNDP in Kazakhstan regards as very timely and topical. Let me also express confidence, that our meeting, exchange of opinions and ideas, theories and practices will help to improve our knowledge and thinking in accordance with the world experience and international norms in the field of natural disaster risk reduction.

Let me wish all participants of the Conference constructive dialogue, successful and fruitful work.

Thank you for your attention.