

Asian Conference on Disaster Management – 13<sup>th</sup> June 2011, Cinnamon Grand Hotel,

Colombo, Sri Lanka,

*Opening Remarks by*

**Mrs S.M Mohamed, Secretary**

*Ministry of Disaster Management, Government of Sri Lanka*

Hon., Mahinda Amaraweera, Minister of Disaster Management, Hon., Dulip Wijesekara, Deputy Minister of Disaster Management, Mr. Shozo Azuma, senior vice Minister of Cabinet office for Disaster Management, Government of Japan, Professor Shigeru Itoh, Chairman of Disaster Reduction Center, Japan.

International Delegations of the ADRC member countries, Representatives of Ministries, Departments, Distinguished Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

I am very pleased and honored to be here today to address the **Asian Conference on Disaster Reduction 2011**. Firstly, I wish to express our most profound condolences and sympathies as well as our solidarity with the people of Japan as you strive to cope with the tragedy whose devastation are still unfolding.

At the same time our sincere appreciation goes to the Asian Disaster Reduction Centre (ADRC) for providing, once again, a precious opportunity to bring together an important group of experts from various national, regional and international organizations from around the world to exchange and share information and experiences, discuss common concerns and identify future

steps to improve capacities of us all, to reduce the negative impacts of disasters and engage in comprehensive risk management.

Disasters not only destroy our efforts for development but always provide a learning opportunity. The lessons learned from 2001 Gujarat earthquake, 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, 2011 Japanese Tsunami and recent floods and landslides in Sri Lanka have demonstrated that Global, Regional as well as National level Disaster risk management networks are need to be improved for future challenges.

Significant knowledge has been generated and national policies developed and certainly international cooperation has been increased. In 2005, the adoption of the Hyogo Framework for Action has marked the critical step by determining priority areas for action.

There has been a significant shift from focusing mainly on preparedness and response to understanding and acting upon risks, their causes, their trends and the measures that can be applied effectively.

However, sad and preventable loss of life and infrastructure in the recent Japanese Earthquake & Tsunami has once again showed that without suitable risk reduction measures, hard gained development can be wiped out in few seconds. The recent floods in Sri Lanka also divert the funds which are planned for development activities.

The Government of Sri Lanka, guided by its strategic development policy called Mahinda Chinthana: Vision for Future, clearly recognizes the importance of safeguarding the earth and land for the benefit of the future generations. The Mahinda Chinthana policy envisioned creating a culture of safety of the nation through systematic management of natural, technological and human-made disaster risks. The key aspects of it are to establish well-equipped training centers to provide training in the field of disaster management and to create awareness among all the citizens on natural disasters, disaster mitigation and climate change adaptation.

Since 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, with the support of several international partners, Government of Sri Lanka adopted legal and institutional frameworks for disaster risk management. We have developed a 10-year Road Map for Disaster Risk Management at national level. The National Policy on Disaster Management in Sri Lanka considers the Hyogo Framework for Action. This is a good example of regions and countries developed regionalized and localized initiatives in keeping with globally agreed-upon frameworks.

There are three major aspects in Disaster risk management that we need to address for effective and efficient disaster risk management in countries. First we have to improve our understanding of hazards. We need to build our understanding on historical and future hazard trends, and their impacts on our people and property. So we can make the most cost effective decisions in our development and investment planning.

Secondly, we need to scale up our work and investment in reducing the impact of disasters, which could be done in short-term and medium-term development planning processes such as National development planning process in Sri Lanka.

Thirdly, we need to identify how to reduce the exposure to disaster risk. This could be done by using medium to long-term development processes, such as urban and regional planning, land-use and city planning, reconstruction after disasters, etc.

Few weeks ago my Minister and I participated at the Global platform for disaster risk reduction in Geneva, where all the decision makers and policy makers involved in Disaster management activities, gathered for a common goal to **“invest today for safer tomorrow”**. The discussions there demonstrated that we now possess the knowledge, the means and the commitment to make disaster risk reduction a national, regional and international priority. Now it is time to convert these knowledge and commitments into action and use sufficiently the available resources by ensuring that the technologies for risk reduction are accessible and by promoting integrated approaches to development that address climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and ecosystem management and restoration.

Organising this regional conference in Sri Lanka shows our close relationship with the regional networks on disaster management mechanisms and our commitment to invest more on disaster risk reduction in Asia. Therefore, this

conference is an excellent platform to share our experiences and to strengthen our relationship for efficient Disaster Risk Management in the region.

Let us consider in this conference why and what we, as risk reduction policy makers and practitioners, can do to accelerate the disaster risk reduction actions and climate change adaptation mechanisms in the region by sharing best practices and lessons learned.

I am sure that you all will use this opportunity to learn from each other, share experiences, build networks and commit to increase our region's resilience for disasters. And I wish you a very pleasant stay in Sri Lanka.

Thank you.