UNISDR
The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction

UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction
2015 Sendai Japan

Video message of Margareta Wahlström

The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction
At the Tokyo Conference on International Study for
Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience, 14 January 2015

Dear colleagues and participants in the Tokyo Conference on International Study for Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience,

In January 2005, the Hyogo Framework for Action was adopted at the 2nd World Conference on Disaster Reduction. It built on the Yokohama Strategy of 1994, but was also inspired by the tragedy of the Indian Ocean Tsunami just three weeks before the conference in Kobe. For the past three years, we have been working on a post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction and resilience.

Science and technology was a driving force for risk reduction in the 1980s and 1990s. In the past decade, it has been too absent. Did scientists in general think everything was resolved, and disaster risk reduction well understood? Did political authorities prioritize research and practice to reduce the loss of life and cost of disasters? We are in the process of finding answers. But more importantly, we are bringing the focus of science and politics back to growing risks -- and in particular those risks that build between expert and scientific fields and receive too little attention.

Let me share a recent anecdote. At a meeting with the private sector, focused on resilience, when discussing disaster impacts and risks, a somewhat frustrated participant said: "But there are solutions to all these issues. Engineers have these solutions." A couple of other participants said then, "Engineers are those who created these problems to start with." This conversation illustrates where we are today.

Post-2015, we need more research and more focus on how risk is generated, and how risk can be prevented and reduced by decisions and measures requiring social as well as political action. Importantly, we need a broader base -- including social sciences, economics, and humanities -- to ensure society as a whole is the topic of study, and to avoid fragmenting the understanding of risk and human decisions and behavior that either increase or reduce risk.

In 2011, active members of the Scientific and Technical Committee of UNISDR prepared a statement

for the 3rd Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, setting out a clear agenda to better align existing science and technical knowledge with efforts to implement the Hyogo Framework for Action. They specifically invited regional and national platforms to include science and technical institutions and issues in their work. They also suggested strengthening the evidence-based work of UNISDR, and called for a rigorous review of the science and technical knowledge by 2015.

The work of the Committee, along with actively engaged science networks around the world, has contributed to ensure a strong science base in the post-2015 disaster risk reduction framework. The need to strengthen scientific work is underlined, to ensure the evidence base in disaster risk and resilience work, including the development of scientific, common methodologies for risk modeling and assessment. The draft also highlights the use of information, communication and space-based technologies, to support disaster risk reduction at all levels.

The draft calls for “easy to understand”, usable, accessible and available knowledge and information. This is a key challenge for science as well as very often for authorities. Why? Because of what we call “translation” challenges. How knowledge is shared, how it is made available and accessible, presented and understood will in the coming decade determine how disaster risk is prevented and reduced, and how social resilience strengthened.

Networks will be the instrument. Shared efforts and partnership among the scientific community, civil society, and private sector offer very productive models. Concrete initiatives from this conference to support such processes and discussions are more than welcome.

I know that the scientific community is very committed to support the implementation of the new framework. I also know that it is a challenge to find the most productive forms and models of engagement with broader society. Meeting you in Sendai in March for the 3rd World Conference will be an opportunity to share ideas and to create partnerships for our continued cooperation.

I wish you a productive conference and I look forward to the outcomes of your conference.
Thank you.

End.