

## **Side Event of the Special Thematic Session on Water and Disasters**

### **Summary**

The Side Event of the Special Thematic Session on Water and Disasters was organized on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2013, in order to facilitate common understanding and shared vision on key topics of water and disasters, and to deepen the discussion prior to the Special Thematic Session on Water and Disasters scheduled for 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2013, which will be the first occasion in UN history dedicated to discussion of water and disasters at the highest level. The event brought together approximately 100 experts from about 30 countries and organizations.

Dr. Han Seung-soo, the co-chair of the Special Thematic Session, opened the event, stressing the importance of addressing issues of water and disasters in order to support sustainable development. This was followed by an address by Dr. Gretchen Kalonji, Assistant Director General of UNESCO, requesting more commitment and cooperation in the area of water and disasters and encouraging participants to make concrete propositions towards the post-2015 agendas. Dr. Kalonji emphasized that the nexus of water and disasters involves complex issues, and that we may view the complexity of the problem as an opportunity to build new models of cooperation.

Three plenary sessions were held during the side event, summaries of which are included in the Annex. The three plenary sessions focused on the following key areas respectively:

- From relief to preparedness – enhancing leadership, governance and coordination system for effective mitigation of mega-water-disasters;
- Addressing Water and Disasters in the context of Post-MDG and Post-Hyogo Process; and
- Integrated Water Resources and Flood Management in the context of International Water Resources Management and Water Cooperation

There was a general consensus that water-related disasters are strongly linked with development/poverty. Given the ever-increasing frequency and severity of hydrometeorological events and current demographic trends, there is urgent need for water and disasters to be addressed to support achievement of sustainable development goals. The issue of water and disasters must be addressed not only at the national and local levels, but also at the international level, as the effect of water-related disasters spread beyond borders in a world where the global economy and society are inseparably connected.

Panelists and participants stressed the need for enhanced risk awareness and communication, and that improved local capabilities to respond to the problems of water and disasters should be achieved through information sharing and capacity building through education and training. Furthermore, a comprehensive approach is vital to address the complex issue of water and disasters. Such an approach should focus on prevention, incorporate structural and non-structural measures, and should be combined with effective emergency relief and recovery strategies.

Through discussion and deliberation during the side event, participants recommended the following overarching actions to be taken by the international community to address water and disasters at the global level:

- Tangible and measurable internationally-agreed targets for disaster risk reduction should be established as part of the post-MDG process. Internationally-agreed goals in the area of water and disasters must be established.
- International and regional cooperation should be enhanced, to facilitate sharing of knowledge and experience in disaster management, and to provide coordination mechanisms for disaster risk monitoring and relief operations. The UN and other regional organizations have vital roles to play in this action.
- Continued efforts are required for implementation of the Action Plan proposed by the High-Level Expert Panel on Water and Disasters. Regular dialogues on water and disasters should be established at the UN.

[Annex]

Plenary Session 1, Chaired by LTG Thomas P. Bostick, Chief of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, generated a lively discussion under the theme of “From relief to preparedness.” The panelists emphasized that strong leadership from top levels of government is crucial for prompt mobilization and coordination at times of disasters. Panelists also emphasized that interests of stakeholders must be met in order to ensure long-term recovery, and that governance systems with multi-sectoral perspectives and a strong commitment to realizing long-term visions have much to offer. Furthermore, there was a general consensus among panelists that prevention pays. Panelists related experiences in large-scale disaster management where investments in prevention, preparedness, and pre-disaster coordination made tremendous differences in terms of costs and time required for recovery. Additionally, panelists agreed that low-probability large-scale disasters should be addressed through a comprehensive approach,

involving a series of structural and non-structural measures for reducing risks. There were also opinions expressed from the floor that smaller disasters that occur day to day cause a significant portion of total damages. The capacities of local communities to address these less visible disasters and adapt to future changes must be enhanced through education and training. Furthermore, given the fact that experience gained during disaster response is often forgotten too quickly and easily, mechanisms for sharing experiences and lessons learned from past disasters, and making this knowledge available for others, should be developed at national, regional, and global levels.

Plenary Session 2 focused around two salient questions: should there be a Post-MDG/Post-Hyogo target for disaster risk reduction, and if so, what should be the target? As panelists stressed the importance of selecting tangible, measurable targets, implicit within this question was the query of how to quantify the selected target. High-level panelists, facilitated by Michel Jarraud of the World Meteorological Organization, addressed these questions directly, stimulating dialogue around how best to implement commonly-accepted scales for measuring risk and vulnerability that are tangible and globally attainable. Panelists stressed the importance of emphasizing integration of climate and disaster risk, shifting disaster management from reactive to proactive, addressing emerging risks, including urbanization, and the importance of equity as a guiding principle. Panelists found consensus in support of SDG targets for disaster risk reduction, however opinions on how best to define targets varied, some calling for an explicit SDG for disaster risk reduction while others felt that disaster risk would best be integrated into several parallel SDGs. The need for consensus from the water-related disaster community regarding how disaster risk reduction is packaged in the Post-MDG/Post-Hyogo environment is clear. Specific targets suggested by panelists included that nations reduce damages from water disaster to 5-7% of GDP, halving the population under high disaster risk, halving (or stabilizing) damages of water related disaster, or increasing access to early warning systems. The Flagship Project of the International Flood Initiative (IFI), *Benchmarking flood risk reduction at global, national, and local scales* was one potential mechanism proposed for informing risk metrics.

Plenary Session 3, *Addressing extreme hydrological events by Integrated Water Resources Management*, chaired by Dr. Keizrul bin Abdullah of NARBO, highlighted the importance of cooperation and coordination among nations, levels of government, sectors, and communities for effective management of disaster risk. Panelists related experiences and case studies from their IWRM work, emphasizing the vital role of sharing; from information, resources, knowledge, technical expertise, and human capacity, panelists suggested sophisticated methods to enhance sharing and collaboration in integrated water

management. Many panelists accentuated integrated approaches to drought management, the “silent” disaster, as well as forward motion towards greater stakeholder involvement and participatory governance rather than top-down management.