

**Green Cities Launch Event:
A Primer on Climate Change Impacts and Disaster Risk Management in Urban Areas in East Asia
Pattaya, Thailand, 14 July 2008**

**Opening Remarks by
Mr. Salvano Briceno, Director, UN/ISDR**

Dear City Representatives, dear Participants, dear Colleagues:

It is with great pleasure that I have accepted the invitation to open this workshop on "Climate Change Impacts and Disaster Risk Management in Urban Areas in Asia and Pacific". I deeply regret not being able to deliver it in person but wanted to share with you, from distance, our thoughts on this important initiative.

At the centre of today's deliberations stands the launch of a new Primer on this topic which has been developed by the World Bank's Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, and the Secretariat of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

By launching the Primer jointly with UCLG here in Pattaya - a day prior to the UCLG Congress - we are grasping a wonderful opportunity to share with a broad range of representatives of local authorities, the many sound practices that cities in East Asia and other parts of the world have adopted to better prepare for the impacts of climate change, in particular more intense and frequent natural hazards, through sound urban planning.

To begin with, let me spend a few moments looking at how climate change and hazard vulnerability are related. As you may be aware, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) provided the international community with three alarming conclusions: first, the confirmation that climate change is happening; secondly, that recent acceleration in climate change is the result of human activity and the emission of greenhouse gases (GHG); and thirdly, that most regions in the world, especially in the developing world, will be increasingly affected by climate change.

The projections of the effects of climate change show that some Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDSs) will be hit earliest and hardest. Climate change is therefore likely to further delay the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in these countries. And, in most cases, climate change superimposes itself on existing vulnerabilities.

This is further supported by recent disaster statistics which demonstrate that disasters are increasing. More than four times as many disasters occurred annually between 2000 and 2006 than during the 1970s with damage costs that were seven times higher at an average of \$83 billion per year. Most disasters, approximately 75% are related to weather events.

Climate change thus has and continues to alter the face of disaster risk, not only through increased weather related risks, melting of the glaciers and sea-level and temperature rise, but also through increases in social vulnerabilities from stresses on water availability, agriculture and ecosystem degradation.

Disaster risk reduction and climate change mitigation and adaptation share a common space of concern, namely: reducing the vulnerability of communities and achieving sustainable development. The importance of disaster risk reduction for reducing the adverse impacts of climate change was recognized by Governments at the 13th session of the Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Bali, in 2007. The Bali Action Plan calls for enhanced action to consider in particular risk management and risk reduction strategies as means to address losses and damages from the impacts of climate change.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the time to increase action is now! Climate change is no longer an issue for the distant future. Although aggressive mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions is crucial if dramatic long-term changes are to be averted, most of the changes projected for the coming decades can no longer be avoided.

However, the good news is that workable solutions and approaches to reduce the adverse impacts of climate change have been developed and tested and are available for replication - also, and especially - in urban areas which have to deal with large populations residing in hazardous areas due to rural-urban migration, poverty and other such factors.

The Primer provides a range of solutions especially tailored to the urban context. It is a tool to assist city authorities with setting their priorities in reducing climate change impacts and addressing disaster risk. It will also help them establish a mandate for their city that allows them to take appropriate action; plan and implement disaster risk management and climate change mitigation and adaptation measures; engage external partners to assist in the process with financial and/or technical assistance; involve their citizens and other cities; and monitor, evaluate, and modify the initiatives as needed.

To support national and local actors to address the calls for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, the ISDR system and its secretariat – stands ready to: Promote and facilitate the collaboration between climate change focal points and experts and their disaster risk reduction counterparts; Make disaster risk reduction information and tools more accessible for climate change adaptation; and Develop guidance on sector-specific risk reduction measures.

For several years already, the ISDR secretariat has provided information and guidance on disaster risk reduction as a tool to manage climate risks and adapt to climate change in line with the Hyogo Framework. The key points include: Using the guidance of the [Hyogo Framework for Action to build the resilience of nations and communities to disasters by 2015](#), agreed by 168 Governments in 2005 to facilitate a systematic, rather than project-based, approach to adaptation to climate change.

Scaling-up the use of existing disaster risk reduction tools that have proven to be effective in dealing with hydro-meteorological events that will be exacerbated by climate change (e.g. vulnerability and risk assessments, early warning systems, land-use planning and building code regulation, and institutional and legal capacities).

Ensuring adaptation to climate change and disaster risk reduction are integrated into development planning in all sectors. Establish inter-ministerial committees or platforms for risk reduction ensuring inter-sector and multi-stakeholder coordination.

Improving capacities and services for knowledge transfer from science to practice and application to bridge gaps in risk management in climate-sensitive sectors.

I would also like reiterate my personal commitment to this cause and share with you a comment by the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, with which I fully agree. He said [at the High-level Meeting on Climate Change during the 62nd Session of the General Assembly]: *"I am convinced that climate change, and what we do about it, will define us, our era, and ultimately the global legacy we leave for future generations. {...} Together, we must ensure that our grandchildren will not have to ask why we failed to do the right thing, and let them suffer the consequences."*

With this, Ladies and Gentlemen, I declare this workshop open, wishing you fruitful discussions and thanking the organizers – the World Bank and the Secretariats of UCLG, the GFDRR and UN/ISDR - for their excellent collaboration in making this event happen.

Thank you.
