Istanbul International Seismic Risk Mitigation Conference  
Opening Remarks  
Istanbul Grand Cevahir Hotel, December 8, 2009

- Distinguished Deputy Prime Minister and Ministers. Distinguished Undersecretaries, Governors, and Mayors. Esteemed guests and participants:

- It is a pleasure and an honor for me to be here with you in Istanbul today for the Istanbul International Conference for Seismic Risk Mitigation.

- I would like to thank the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency and the Istanbul Governor’s Office for hosting this event.

- Istanbul is one of the truly great cities in the world. Istanbul is also one of the world’s most vulnerable cities.

- This year marks the 10th anniversary of the devastating Marmara earthquakes of August 17 and November 12 of 1999. 17,000 people died. Direct economic losses alone totaled about US $5 billion.

- With this conference, we commemorate this catastrophic event; we reflect on the actions taken since then to anticipate, prepare for, and reduce the impact of such disasters—in Turkey and around the world; and we look for ways to further reduce seismic risk in the future.


- Since then, Turkey implemented several major disaster management projects, which the Bank has had the opportunity to support:

- These projects were successful. They achieved three important results:
  1. The projects included major physical investments for recovery and reconstruction.
  2. The projects helped build and strengthen Turkey’s institutions to mitigate disasters.
  3. The projects led to significant innovations in disaster management.
• I would like to highlight two examples of such innovations:
  o One example is the creation of the Turkish Catastrophe Insurance Pool, “DASK,” in 1999. The pool helps provide damage compensation payments to people immediately when they need it, and it also spreads risks efficiently through the insurance markets.
  o Another advance was the establishment, for the first time in Turkey, of a new, central coordination mechanism for emergency management, TEMAD.

• The Istanbul Seismic Risk Mitigation and Emergency Preparedness (ISMEP) project that Istanbul Province started in February 2006, with financing from the Bank and the support of the Turkish Treasury, became the first project in Turkey fully focused on disaster risk mitigation. The project:
  o strengthens local disaster response and emergency management capacity;
  o retrofits schools, hospitals and other important public facilities;
  o and helps protect cultural heritage buildings from natural hazards.

• The Istanbul Municipal Infrastructure Project that Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality is implementing, again with financing from the Bank and the support of the Turkish Treasury, also has some seismic risk mitigation activities, such as strengthening of viaducts, underpasses and overpasses.

• With the Istanbul Seismic Risk Mitigation and Emergency Preparedness (ISMEP) project, the Government of Turkey took strategic steps to transform Istanbul, into a city resilient to major earthquakes within a decade or two.
  o Indeed, Istanbul’s current seismic risk mitigation program is large by any international standards.
  o Moreover, the program follows international good practice and it has created a trusted and respected framework for Turkey to attract the coordinated support of the international community.

• Istanbul has achieved much in disaster mitigation and management in recent years. I had the chance to visit the Disaster and Emergency Management Center of the Office of the Governor of Istanbul as well as Aya Irini—which you will also have the chance to visit on the last day of the conference. I came away impressed with the state-of-the-art technology, with the high level of Istanbul’s preparedness, and also with Istanbul’s hospitality and readiness to share its experience.
While Istanbul is becoming a leader in disaster management in Turkey, indeed in the region, I would also like to highlight a major achievement in disaster mitigation and management at the national level in Turkey: the establishment by the Turkish Government of a unified Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency under the Prime Ministry in June 2009.

- The new Presidency consolidates three, until recently separate agencies.
- This consolidation lays the basis for much improved coordination and for much more efficient and effective disaster management in Turkey.
- It is a step that puts Turkey ahead of many other countries.
- The World Bank enthusiastically welcomes and supports this reform.

This conference serves as a platform, 10 years after the Marmara Earthquakes, for sharing international experience and lessons learned in disaster mitigation and management.

It also will serve, I hope, as a launching pad for more good practice action—including for replicating some of the achievements here in Istanbul.

In this way—sharing experiences and replicating good practices—Turkey is set to become a “Center of Excellence” in earthquake risk management.

On this path to excellence in earthquake and disaster risk management, we in the World Bank will be happy to continue our close partnership with Turkey, and with the international disaster management community.

Thank you all for joining us today. Çok Teşekkürler.