

Remarks at opening of Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Sendai (Japan), 13 March 2015

Ohayo gozaimasu. Good morning.

On behalf of the United Nations, I am honoured to welcome all partners to Sendai. I thank the Government of Japan for hosting this important Conference and the citizens of Sendai for their warm hospitality.

I am particularly honored by the presence of Their Majesties and their strong support for this important issue, disaster risk reduction, and I thank Your Majesties.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Japan has made immense contributions to the United Nations and our world.

I also thank donors to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, so ably led by my Special Representative, Ms. Margareta Wahlstrom.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

You have made this the highest-level meeting on disaster risk reduction in history.

This is the first stop on our journey to a new future to put our people of the world and this world onto a sustainable path.

Disaster risk reduction advances progress on sustainable development and climate change.

An ambitious outcome from this meeting will put us on a path to a new sustainable development agenda with a set of sustainable development goals; a universal, meaningful climate change agreement; and financing to turn plans into actions.

Success here will drive the momentum for the July meeting in Addis Ababa on financing; the September sustainable development special summit meeting in New York; and the Paris climate change summit meeting.

Sustainability starts in Sendai.

We meet just days after the solemn fourth anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Just now, tropical cyclone Pam is bearing down on Vanuatu and beyond.

Overnight, the eye of the storm passed very close to the capital, Port Vila. We are not yet clear on the impact of the disaster, but we fear the destruction and damage could be widespread.

I hope there will be minimal loss of life. I extend my deepest condolences and sympathy to the people of Vanuatu and their representatives.

I just met the President of Vanuatu this morning, and I conveyed my personal and, on behalf of the United Nations, our deepest condolences, as well as our strong commitment and solidarity to the people of Vanuatu.

What we are discussing here is very real for millions around the world. We must keep their needs in sharp focus during the negotiations on this agreement.

Our thoughts are with all disaster victims. Our best possible tribute will be to make this Conference a great success.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

The Hyogo Framework for Action adopted a decade ago has saved thousands of people's lives.

Now we must respond to the world's growing needs by empowering individuals, supporting communities and backing promises with resources.

We must especially help the poorest and most vulnerable people.

Climate change is intensifying the risks for hundreds of millions of people, particularly in small island developing States and coastal areas.

Disasters put persons with disabilities and older persons in grave danger.

Nine out of ten disaster fatalities are in low- and middle-income countries.

Those States need our special attention. But disaster risk reduction is in everybody's interest – and it is everybody's business.

In this globalized economy, our world is smaller than ever.

An earthquake in one country shakes up financial markets in another.

Tropical storms in one region cause economic turbulence in another.

Disaster risk reduction is a frontline defence against the impact of climate change. It is a smart investment for business and a wise investment in saving lives.

The global annual price tag in damage now exceeds \$300 billion. We can watch that number grow as more people suffer. Or we can dramatically lower that figure and invest savings in development.

Six billion dollars allocated each year can result in savings of up to \$360 billion by 2030.

Resilience is not just a matter of strong buildings that can withstand earthquakes.

True resilience comes from strong bonds among countries and communities. That is why we are meeting here in Sendai.

The United Nations is committed to strengthening these bonds with a unified Plan of Action. I count on your engagement.

Let us act in a spirit of global solidarity to make our world safer and more prosperous for all.

I thank you.

Arigato gozaimasu.