



**World Conference on Disaster Reduction  
Kobe, Hyogo, Japan, 18-22 January 2005**

**Statement by Joke Waller-Hunter  
Executive Secretary, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**

The risks of weather-related disasters have always been with mankind, and far too often floods, droughts, storms, heatwaves and other disasters have led to human suffering, often hitting the poor hardest. The efforts leading up to the World Conference in Yokohama in May 1994 have brought about a global consensus that much can and should be done to prevent and prepare for disasters. The Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action was adopted just two months after the entry into force in March 1994 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention that aims at preventing dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system and that I represent at this meeting.

For the last ten years, the work on disaster reduction and the international cooperation on climate change have both advanced significantly. The growing concerns about the impacts of global climate change led to the development of the concept of climate-related disasters that built on the work to address the risks related to extreme weather events. Scientific understanding of the problems and of the links between climate change and climate-related disasters has grown much firmer. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in its Third Assessment Report recognized that climate change would affect the severity, frequency and spatial distribution of extreme weather events. IPCC scenarios have linked higher atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases to a rise in global mean temperature, which, in turn, has been associated with sea level rise and greater and more abrupt climatic variations resulting in more frequent and increasingly destructive extreme weather events.

The devastating tsunami that hit communities on the Indian Ocean focussed the eyes of the world on the vulnerability of coastal areas in a way and at a scale that was unimaginable up to now. While there is of course no causal link to be made between the tsunami and climate change, it provides a magnified warning of the impacts of extreme events. The catastrophe has also taught a painful lesson on the range of actions that could have been taken to reduce the impacts of such a disaster, including early warning. Many of these actions would also be part of strategies to adapt to climate change.

The tenth session of the Conference of the Parties of the Climate Change Convention (COP 10) held last month in Buenos Aires saw an exchange of views on UNFCCC activities relevant to the World Conference on Disaster Reduction and requested the secretariat to report to you on these agreed activities. I am very pleased to be able to convey to you the support expressed by COP 10 for the successful outcome of this conference.

A key outcome of COP 10, and highly relevant for this meeting, was the adoption of the Buenos Aires programme of work on adaptation and response measures. This programme clearly reflects the enhanced emphasis in the UNFCCC process on adaptation to climate change that, since COP 7, has complemented the work on mitigation. The Buenos Aires programme emphasizes the need to build capacity, including institutional capacity, for preventive measures, planning, preparedness and management of disasters relating to climate change, as well as for contingency planning, in particular for droughts and floods. Among the actions required to reduce the vulnerability to climate change, many are also part of disaster risk reduction strategies. These include establishing early warning systems for extreme weather events and work on insurance and risk assessments, to highlight just a few. COP 10 also adopted a decision on the implementation of the global observation system for climate, which will assist the characterization of extreme events. Recent work in the UNFCCC secretariat has resulted in an up-to-date compendium on methodologies for adaptation, an important information tool.

Close coordination between these activities, pursued in the context of the UNFCCC, and the efforts to promote disaster reduction in general that are part of the broader agenda of this Conference could benefit both sides. So far, there has been good, mutually supportive collaboration between the two secretariats. Synergy and cooperation at the international level can also facilitate the necessary coordination between the disaster reduction and the climate change communities at the national level.

In conclusion: there are many links between strategies for disaster reduction and strategies to adapt to climate change. Both assist countries in their pursuit of sustainable development. The implementation of the Buenos Aires programme of work on adaptation and response measures will undoubtedly benefit from a successful outcome of this Kobe Conference.

Let me finish by commending our host country, Japan, for providing leadership in both areas, of which Kobe and Kyoto provide clear testimony.

- - - - -