

**Statement on behalf of the African Group  
At the First Preparatory Committee of the World  
Conference on Disaster Reduction  
Geneva 6-7 MAY 2004**

The African Group ,

Welcoming the General Assembly Resolution A/RES/58/214 which decided to convene the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2005. This reflects the deep concern of the International Community at the number and scale of natural disasters and their increasing impacts which have resulted in massive loss of life and long-term negative social, economic and environmental consequences for vulnerable societies, in particular in developing countries .

Recalling the conclusions of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and in particular its Implementation Plan which recognizes disaster reduction as a central component of sustainable Development. Chapters II and IV of this Plan of Implementation stressed the need for efforts to reduce the impact of natural disasters in order to ensure poverty eradication and to protect and manage natural resources bases and economic and social development. Poverty eradication and sustainable development are presently widely regarded as being the major challenges facing humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Recalling relevant international policy initiatives and measures, most notably the Millennium Summit, the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, the World Summit on Sustainable Development: Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries ;

Expressing its deep gratitude to the Government of Japan for its generous offer to host the above-mentioned Conference as well as its financial contribution to ensure the participation of developing countries in PrepCom II and the Kobe Conference.

Highlighting the initiative of ISDR in creating its regional office in Africa in cooperation with NEPAD and the African Union other initiatives to focus the attention of African Governments and their commitments to the need for disaster risk strategies and how to implement them.

Greatly appreciate and encourage the increasing establishment by various African countries of their national platforms, legislative frameworks, national preparedness, mitigation and prevention planning, as well as the large-scale efforts they invest in this respect. The African Group recognizes, however, that the reality is still far from satisfactory mainly because of the combination of the frequency and the magnitude of disasters and the high degree of vulnerability, due to the fragile economies of African countries, their modest social and economic infrastructure, tough environment, extreme poverty and high level of foreign debt.

All these phenomena are exacerbated by the high incidence and impact of HIV and AIDS on families and communities, which adds to the impact of disaster on communities and the countries but also severely inhibits the recovery of communities from disasters.

Suffice it to say that in Africa billions of US dollars were diverted in urgent humanitarian relief, at the expense of poverty alleviation and economic and social development. In Africa, over 52% of people live on one US\$/day These people are barely surviving, and when disaster strike them, they have very little capacity to withstand them and to recover. Their socio-economic development is severely set back by the impact of disasters

The achievement of successful policy initiatives to reduce risks necessitates the adoption of a holistic approach to risk prevention and reduction consisting of concerted action combining government actors, non-governmental and other organisations of the civil society, international organisations and the private sector.

The political commitment of African governments to disaster risk reduction has definitely been established in the African Ministerial Statement to the World Summit on Sustainable Development issued in October 2001. What remains is the need to bridge the gap between commitment and implementation. Thus, implementation necessitates the setting by national authorities of their own disaster reduction frameworks including appropriate institutional and legislative arrangements.

The Yokohama Declaration and Plan of Action stresses that it's the primary responsibility of national government to identify their requirements in terms of disaster management frameworks, legislation, and envisage that assistance will be provided by the donors and relevant international institutions for capacity building, training, and integration of communication

In view of what precedes, the African group calls for :

- The necessity for African governments to grant disaster reduction the appropriate priority attention it deserves, as a major component of sustainable development and to implement their political commitments in this regard during the Johannesburg Summit and take into account vulnerability and risk reduction in the elaboration of national development policies and strategies ;
- The integration of natural and environmental disasters policies into national development planning process, taking into consideration the various requirements of prevention and mitigation and disaster management ;
- To initiate a study / fact finding work on the effects of natural and environmental disasters on the phenomenon of "trafficking in human beings" ;

- The establishment of well-defined partnership mechanisms in disaster reduction with national entities, regional and international organisations ;
- Fostering national ownership of the disaster reduction process, through consultation with the communities by national, and local authorities, and in cooperation with the international community ;
- The creation of an international fund to assist developing countries in disaster risk management and response. The fund could assist these countries in reinforcing their capacities with regard to the aspects pertaining to hazards management mainly the identification , public awareness raising the early-warning systems, the intervention in the event of disasters and post-disaster rehabilitation ;
- The financial assistance of financial institutions as well as international organisations to African Governments and various regional and sub-regional organisations to build their capacity to create and implement the necessary frameworks and bodies for effective disaster risk reduction ;
- The setting up of appropriate mechanisms for ensuring technical and financial assistance for vulnerable developing countries, mainly for disaster preparedness (including early warning systems) ;

The support for African countries to set up their own institutional and legal frameworks, to help them better prevent disaster impacts ;

- The identification of the gaps and the difficulties encountered by African countries while implementing the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action ;
- The inclusion of locust invasion, illicit traffic of hazardous waste, floods, droughts desertification and earthquakes in the list of disasters to be tackled by Kobe Conference ;
- The reinforcement of public awareness and the establishment of regional mechanisms and communication systems for urgent response to disasters and the exchange of information, experience and resources, including expertise at the regional and international levels ;
- The generation of a culture of disaster prevention through regular education and information campaign.

Finally, we welcome the opportunity to take stock of national implementation measures over the last ten years. We encourage our fellow african Governments to submit their national inputs to the ISDR before 15 June, and welcome the opportunity that is presented by the NEPAD/AU experts meeting in Johannesburg on 31 May and 1 June 2004, and the back-to-back inter-governemental meeting to be held also in Johannesburg from 2-3 June 2004.