

San Jose Declaration

Pan-American Health Organization

The representatives of the American countries, international agencies and the other participants gathered at the Hemispheric Meeting of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction assembled in San Jose, Costa Rica held:

Considering:

1. That the American Hemisphere is a geographical entity in which natural phenomena, in relation with the economic, social, and institutional vulnerability of the region, have various disastrous impacts of diverse magnitude as a consequence of earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, landslides, floods, wildfires, and hurricanes, such as the most recent George and Mitch, and climatic variations such as El Niño and La Niña, among others, which are recurrent obstacles for development;
2. That the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction has brought about qualitative improvements in the region by increasing awareness of the importance of reducing vulnerability and mitigating the effects of natural disasters, although a significant degree in the reduction of such impacts has not yet been accomplished;
3. The resolutions of the General Assembly of the United Nations on the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction; the international cooperation on the El Niño; the Report from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), as well as the conclusions of the regional meetings from IDNDR;
4. The "Yokohama Strategy and Action Plan" adopted by the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction held in Yokohama, Japan, in May 1994;
5. The regional cooperation agreements on natural disasters and the resolutions adopted by the Latin American and Caribbean countries in their regional and sub-regional instances, as well as the Summit of the Americas Plan of Action; and
6. That disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness must have a multi-risk character, including both natural and technological hazards.

Affirm that:

1. Disaster reduction is the set of prevention, mitigation and preparedness measures;
2. Disasters affect human beings health and well-being, in particular those who are most vulnerable due to socio-economic factors, such as poverty, which is at the same time, both a cause and an effect of disasters;

3. Human behavior affects the environment which, in turn, increases the potential negative impact of disasters;
4. In order to achieve sustainable human development, it is critical to adopt policies and strategies aimed at reducing vulnerability, as an integral part of development planning;
5. National institutions responsible for prevention and mitigation, as well as those in charge of preparedness and emergency management, present varying levels of progress and efficiency in different countries. They need further strengthening, modernization, and adaptation to the profile of existing risks. It is critical that civil society be involved effectively in this process;
6. The institutional efforts in the domain of disaster prevention, mitigation, and preparedness as well as emergency management, have not matched the actual needs;
7. The challenge of reducing the impact of all kinds of disaster is permanent and requires an institutional framework equally constant at the local, national, regional, and global levels; and
8. The initiatives of civil and community level organizations that operate regionally to strengthen risk management.

Recommend:

1. To adopt risk assessment as indispensable criteria for development planning by means of effective and recognised methodologies, as the basis for effective disaster reduction policies;
2. To carry out the integrated analysis of vulnerability affecting the entire society, involving the public and private sectors in disaster reduction activities, within the framework of sustainable development;
3. To include disaster reduction measures in national legal and institutional frameworks, taking into account the different requirements and objectives of prevention and mitigation, as well as those of preparedness and disaster management. To this purpose, governments must strengthen institutions in charge of disaster management. Furthermore, they must guarantee the functional continuity through permanent human resources;
4. To include on a constant basis, local communities and their organisations, with an equal participation of men and women, in the process of planning, social control, and policy aspects, and establish those mechanisms that are necessary to this purpose;
5. That the countries of the hemisphere establish mechanisms and tools in order to ensure the participation of the scientific and technical community in the planning and

implementation of risk prevention and mitigation as a basic contribution to the decision making process;

6. That governments include vulnerability and risk reduction elements in the formulation of national policies, strategies, and development plans, and adopt common regional and sub-regional strategies to optimize the use of national and international resources;

7. To conclude bilateral and sub-regional cooperation agreements in order to share resources and experiences in disaster prevention and mitigation, as well as in preparedness and mutual assistance in case of disaster;

8. To strengthen international cooperation with a focus on the modernization of monitoring and measurement networks for disasters of all kinds, as well as real-time communication systems for the exchange of this information, with the purpose of elaborating forecasts and warnings in the case of emergencies, and having access to and the use of appropriate technology;

9. To develop a regional culture of prevention and mitigation, including education, training, and dissemination programs at all levels, as well as the participation of civil society and the technical and scientific communities in this field;

10. To allot financial resources for activities and projects on disaster management and the environment through existing international mechanisms. This should include the strengthening of international cooperation in this domain with emphasis on the needs of developing countries as they relate to human resource training, equipment modernization, information dissemination, and research promotion;

11. That the prevention, mitigation, and preparedness relating to technological disasters should be part of the priorities of national and international organisations responsible for risk management. In this context, the development and strengthening of national and regional plans should be promoted while taking into account the interaction between natural phenomena and the impact of technological accidents;

12. To bring to the attention of the United Nations, the attribution of special recognition to those countries that reorient part of their defense budget to disaster reduction.;

13. That the United Nations System continues to perform the functions of international coordination and promotion of disaster reduction in the future, in order to ensure the durability of achieved results, particularly in the Latin American and Caribbean region. In order to do this, the participants support the initiative of establishing an inter-agency coordination mechanism with an interdisciplinary and intersectoral nature, with a strong and efficient technical cooperation presence in the region.

Done at San Jose, Costa Rica, 04 June, 1999