

**INTERNATIONAL CELEBRATION
OF WORLD DISASTER
REDUCTION DAY**

International Celebration of the 1997 World Disaster Reduction Day in Divonne, France

In line with the theme of the 1997 World Disaster Reduction Campaign on the socio-economic impact of water-related disasters, it was decided to hold the international celebration of World Disaster Reduction Day in Divonne, France, in the proximity of Geneva, as the city is renowned as a thermal bath resort. The Mayor of Divonne invited representatives of Permanent Missions, IDNDR Scientific and Technical Committee (STC) members, journalists and local authorities in charge of disaster management to the town hall. This occasion provided an opportunity for journalists to be briefed on the campaign and to meet the STC members. That same week, an important meeting of the STC was being held in Geneva.

In addition, a message was issued by the United Nations Secretary-General on the Day. A message was also issued by the Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organisation. A press kit and two posters were produced and distributed and a press conference for UN-accredited journalists in Geneva was held on 3 October, which resulted in a series of wire service articles and radio interviews.

International Celebration of the 1998 World Disaster Reduction Day in Geneva, Switzerland

The international celebration of the 1998 World Disaster Reduction Day took place in Geneva, Switzerland, on 14 October. The Day was marked by:

- The presentation of the United Nations Sasakawa Disaster Prevention Award by the United Nations Under Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, to Mr. Duo Ji Cai Rang, Minister of Civil Affairs of China and Professor Wang Ang-Sheng of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Certificates of distinction were also awarded to the following institutions: the National Disaster Prevention Centre (Mexico); the National Survey for Seismic Protection (Armenia); the Academy of Science Research and Technology (Egypt); and the Australian IDNDR Coordinating Committee (Australia).

In addition, certificates of merit for commendable disaster reduction efforts were awarded to the Nepal Geological Society; Dr. Istvan Orovecz of the Hungarian National Civil Defence; Mr. Abd El-Kareem Jabareen of the Department of Protection and Safety and Civil Defence Directorate of Jordan; Professor Dr. Ch. Dugarjav from Mongolia; and Mr. Romeo Daluz Lacorum from the Philippines.

- A round-table on RISK PARTNERSHIP, chaired by Mr. Sergio Vieira de Mello, with the participation of eminent personalities, such as the winners of the Sasakawa Award.
- The presentation of the prizes for the 1998 International Photo Contest to Mr. Azizur Rahim Pev of Bangladesh, Mr. Monowar Hossain Akhand of Bangladesh, and the Geotechnical Engineering Office of Hong Kong.
- The presentation of the Caribbean Artists' contribution to disaster reduction "A Song for Montserrat."

High-level representatives of Permanent Missions and of the United Nations, including Mr. Rubens Ricupero, Secretary-General of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and Ms. Mary Robinson, High Commissioner for Human Rights, attended the event.

On the occasion of the Day, the United Nations Secretary-General issued a message on natural disaster reduction. Moreover, a press conference was held at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 18 September to launch the press kit on the campaign and to release the programme of activities for World Disaster Reduction Day. A video and radio programme and two posters were also produced by the IDNDR Secretariat for the Day.

INTERNET CONFERENCES

Following in the footsteps of the successful 1996 Internet Conference on "Solutions for Cities at Risk," the IDNDR Secretariat organised, with the support of the Peruvian Non-Governmental Organisation Quipunet, two consecutive Internet Conferences as part of the 1997 and 1998 World Disaster Reduction Campaigns.

The use of the Internet facilitated an extremely dynamic team effort involving professionals and concerned citizens worldwide at very little cost. Nothing illustrated this better than the way the Conferences were organised. IDNDR Secretariat staff were working in Geneva and Costa Rica; the web site server was located in the San Francisco State University campus; the Quipunet team was spread from Australia to Ecuador, from Peru to the United States, from Taiwan to Spain; and the moderators were based in several countries. Moreover, the Conferences were both in English and Spanish thanks to the participation of many volunteer translators

A wide range of other organisations contributed to promoting and developing the Internet Conferences, including UN programmes, national governments, universities and private associations.

The goals of the Conferences were to promote a culture of disaster prevention, exchange experiences, discuss specific issues within a rigorous conceptual framework, and encourage networking among decision-makers, professionals, and ordinary citizens.

The participants were a very diverse group, professionally and geographically. The large number of people who participated in both years is very encouraging and indicates the usefulness of Internet conferencing as a communications' tool for the exchange of expertise, and as a networking tool for all those directly or indirectly involved in natural disaster reduction.

1997 INTERNET CONFERENCE: "Floods, Droughts: Issues for the 21st Century"

The 1997 Internet Conference on "Floods, Droughts: Issues for the 21st Century" was part of the 1997 World Disaster Reduction Campaign on "Water: Too Much... Too Little... Leading Cause of Natural Disasters" It took place over a period of five weeks from 22 September to 24 October 1997. It involved a wide range of people from all sectors of society in 60 different countries. Approximately 700 people registered through the e-mail and several thousands viewed the Conference on the web site.

The Conference aimed to take stock of the current prevention efforts to mitigate the socio-economic impacts of floods and drought; to focus on the unanswered questions about flood and drought management; and to identify issues and potential solutions for the 21st century. The programme was as follows:

*WEEK ONE: 22 - 26 September
THEME: Welcome and Focus on Floods*

*WEEK TWO: 29 September - 3 October
THEME: Focus on Floods*

*WEEK THREE: 6 - 10 October
THEME: World Disaster Reduction Week*

*WEEK FOUR: 13 - 17 October
THEME: Session on Drought*

*WEEK FIVE: 20 - 24 October
THEME: Session on Drought*

The wide range of topics discussed covered all elements of the disaster cycle and addressed many of the multi-disciplinary problems associated with flood and drought that exist today. Papers, reports and comments were received from all over the world, providing a range of views and perspectives on flood and drought mitigation, as well as on specific events.

While we do not attempt to summarise all the individual contributions here, we set out to include comments on some themes which ran through many of the contributions.

The following are excerpts from the summary provided by Dr. John Handmer, Professor of Environmental Geography at Middlesex University, on the first part of the Conference, which focused on floods:

On Prevention

We can take only limited action to prevent the physical phenomenon of flooding from occurring, but we can take action to prevent the water from leading to a disaster. The focus on prevention needs to be on reducing the vulnerability of human settlements and activities to floods. Information is needed and is the basis for many sound floodplain management measures. However, much of the population lives in settlements and buildings which are outside the control of formal planning systems.

On the Role of Government

Governments everywhere are evaluating their role and, in general, reducing their commitment to social welfare. In conjunction with the apparently unstoppable move to a global market, this may have important implications for the vulnerability of many communities to hazards.

Governments need to explicitly consider their attitude to hazard management. How are the aims of hazard management to be integrated with the imperatives of sustainable development and with the very strong deregulatory emphasis accompanying economic globalisation? Possible approaches are emerging from the United States.

On Economic Development or Flood Management Reduction

The floodplain is an important environmental asset and its natural function is to convey and store flood water. But the same area is also a significant economic resource and, in some cities,

it may be the only space available for people to live, or on which to locate commercial development.

As flood specialists, we may want to see the floodplain clear of housing, but community leaders may feel that other priorities, like cheap housing or access to employment, are more important. The pressure for these priorities is likely to increase along with urbanisation. Increasing global competition between cities as they seek commercial development is likely to make it more difficult to restrict floodplain development.

This conflict exists in one way or another in most communities, and resolution calls for a process where the different interests can discuss their priorities and concerns and move towards solutions. Solutions are unlikely to mean that the floodplain remains clear of development, but may mean that development is more compatible with flooding and that vulnerability is reduced. The existence of such processes is an important part of government's capacity to manage development.

On Evaluation and Learning

Knowledge of the performance of many flood hazard management policies and strategies is poor. Learning demands more than careful evaluation of programmes and activities: it demands an attitude that is open to critical reflection and change. Evaluation is needed at the project level for the economic, social and environmental feasibility of projects. But it is also needed at the far more challenging level of our whole approach to hazard management, as institutions and communities try to come to grips with global environmental and economic change.

The following is part of the summary by Mr. Jon Ingleton, of Natural Disaster Management, on the second part of the Conference, which concentrated on drought:

Though there is no shortage of information that can be used to help combat the negative socio-

economic impact of a drought, the Conference highlighted a serious demand for more pro-active, centralised and accountable management structures and systems on a local, national and international level. It perhaps even prompted the need for an international centre to collate, disseminate and distribute successful drought mitigation and response procedures.

The current lack of effective management was emphasised in the paper by Mr. Clever Mustafa, of the Disaster Management Information Project of India, on "Risks Related to Community Water Supply," in which he describes some of the problems experienced in Southern Africa: "Water harvesting techniques are generally poor, the delivery system is wasteful; the pricing regimes are generally not cost effective; consumption levels are high, particularly in urban areas; pollution control is generally ineffective; and actual management is fragmented, often among institutions with competing interests."

Mr Mustafa's observations are not unique to Southern Africa and could have been avoided with effective management and greater cooperation between the parties concerned. It should not require international legislation to force cooperation, but it does require strong management - a challenge indeed, but one which, when overcome, is rewarded by lives saved and property protected.

1998 INTERNET CONFERENCE :

"Natural Disaster Prevention Begins with Information"

The 1998 Internet Conference was based on the theme "Natural Disaster Prevention Begins with Information" as part of the wider 1998 World Disaster Reduction Campaign "Natural Disaster Prevention and the Media - Prevention Begins with Information." By tackling this theme, the goal

was to interest the media in disaster prevention . Issues related to communication and information, in the realm of disaster prevention, were discussed over a period of 3 weeks, from 28 September to 18 October, by journalists, disaster managers, public information specialists inside and outside the United Nations from all over the world. More than 700 participants from 60 countries took part in it. An experienced and respected selection of disaster prevention professionals and commentators were recruited to provide the keynote papers and stimulate the discussions and debate.

But did the Conference fulfil the ambitious aspirations of the organisers and participants? Following is a summary of the conference by Mr. Jon Ingleton of Natural Disaster Management. This summary is made up of a selection of quotes from the papers presented each week, to highlight some of the key points made during the conference.

WEEK ONE: 28 September - 4 October TOPIC: Media and Disaster Prevention

On Monday 28 September, Mr. Philippe Boullé, Director of the IDNDR Secretariat, opened the conference and justified the choice of topic for the 1998 conference: "It is our aim to enlist the media as partners in order to inform an ever-increasing audience about the need for sound disaster prevention practices for societies' healthy and sustainable development." Not only did Mr. Boullé's paper illustrate the importance of engaging the assistance of the media in all stages of disaster management, but he also encouraged a philosophy of partnership, cooperation and communication.

Mr. Peter Dykstra, Senior Producer of CNN, explained how the media has an important role in terms of educating the population. "In a more long-term role, the mass media can help explain the nature of El Niño events, the need for

earthquake preparedness in areas which have no contemporary history of quakes; or perhaps help explain, or debate, the links between long-term climate change and possible future disasters." There is little doubt that the power of television as a form of media is enormous and, when harnessed for the purposes of education, can be beneficial in equally large measures.

Of course, the success of the above depends on the methods that are used to initiate and implement a working relationship between the media and the general public. Mr. Athanase Karayenga, Journalist and Communication Expert of BONEKA Communications, said, "For public opinion to adopt a culture of prevention, a sound, imaginative and efficient communication strategy with the media needs to be developed."

Mr. Tim Radford, Science Editor of The Guardian, addressed some of the questions relating to the media's coverage of natural disasters from the journalists' point of view: "Why is it that, when disaster is a foreseeable event involving real lives the media takes no serious interest whatever in the warnings? There are several reasons. One depends on the quality of the disaster. The other depends on the quality of the warnings." This

Press Conference by Mr. Diao Ji Cai Rong, Minister of Civil Affairs of China, Professor Wang Ang-beng of the Chinese Academy of Science, and Mr. Philippe Boulé, Director IDNDR on the Saeki Award and on the prevention of natural disaster in China.

14 October 11 a.m., Room III

Correspondents present:

Jean Paul Houreau	Deutsche Welle, Afrique francophone Africa Economic Digest, London
Gilles Lazfost	A.F.P.
Tara Freedman	A.F.P.
Gordon Martin	The Daily Telegraph
Carmen Rodriguez	E.F.E.
Jean-Pierre Kaop	NZZ
Donald Stampfli	A.P. Photo
Huang Liangde	China Radio International
Wei Bai	Xinhua News Agency
Dasheng Lu	Xinhua News Agency
Jun Liu	Guang Ming Daily
Geir Moulson	AP
Claire Doole	BBC

Questions asked by:

Jean-Pierre Kaop	NZZ
Claire Doole	BBC
Gordon Martin	The Daily Telegraph
Tara Freedman	A.F.P.

paper also warned that if the information provided to the media is unsatisfactory, then there is an increased likelihood of the final article we read being unsatisfactory.

A lesson to be drawn from Tim Radford's paper is to recognise that the media's quality of reporting will be enhanced with more accurate information, and once the media is better educated, so is the population as a whole. We must learn to work together for mutual benefit.

Badaoui Rouhban, Chief of the Unit for Disaster Reduction of UNESCO, echoed the desire for an educated population in his comments to close the first week of the conference: "It is time to bring the full force of scientific and technological advancement into synergy with broader education and public information to prevent disasters. Sustainable safety cannot be attained without empowering individuals to learn, understand and act... The long-term goal should be to have an informed populace prepared to support new policies, new legislation, new research, new products or new technology, new attitudes and lifestyles which are tailored to cope with natural hazards... Public understanding is thus the fuel or energy which must drive and support change at all levels of society which will ultimately achieve the culture of prevention."

WEEK TWO: 5 - 11 October

TOPIC: Public Information: How To Get the Message Out?

Once the desire for better information had been established, the conference moved on to discussing the way in which this information should be conveyed. A strategy of getting the messages out is necessary to reinforce and promote a culture of prevention. Local, national and international organisations and institutions use different ways to approach communities and decision-makers. Media is one important tool to reach out. modern information technology is

another. Week 2 sought to discuss and debate appropriate and effective means of information transfer either by the use of technological means or other.

We all recognise that the Internet is a particularly powerful tool with an increasing importance as a form of media. Avagene Moore of Emergency Information Infrastructure Partnership (EIIP) said, "Whether seeking to disseminate information related to disaster prevention or some other aspect of disaster management, the Internet and other technologies are viable communication tools to use in conjunction with other public information and educational efforts and campaigns." We must also be aware of the limitations of the Internet at this early stage of its development and that as a form of communication, its audience does not always include those for whom its information would be most valuable

In describing the Geotechnical Engineering Office (GEO) public communications strategy, Andy Ho of PA Professional Consultants Ltd., and K P Yim and Jerry Ho of GEO, Civil Engineering Department in Hong Kong, emphasised the importance of the role of the media: "Special efforts are made to build up a partnership with the media with the assistance of professional consultants. The media has played an important role in carrying the message of disaster prevention." Partnerships rely on each party understanding the needs of each other. The message to the media must meet, at worst, previously agreed minimum content criteria. Failure to do so will frequently mean that the message is not passed on to those who really need it

WEEK THREE: 12 - 18 October

TOPIC: What is the Disaster Prevention Message?

What is undisputed about the disaster prevention message is that it must be consistent and clear. These criteria were apparent in most of the papers and comments during Week 3, including the paper from Mr. Michael Armstrong, Associate Director for Mitigation of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA): "Policy implementers must invite and encourage academic commentary and participation. Time is too short, the opportunity is too fleeting, and the needs are too urgent for agendas not to be joined."

Dr. John-Paul Mulilis, Assistant Professor of Psychology at Penn State University confirmed the importance of a clear message and used the PrE theory as a method of achieving sufficient impact to encourage response. According to PrE theory, in order to increase levels of preparedness a message aimed at such efforts must not only depict an event as threatening, but at the same time, present an individuals preparedness resources as sufficient to overcome such a threat.

The communication of disaster preparedness and response information is a continuous process, not just to be provided when a disaster is imminent or happening. This point came across in Ms. Gloria Bratschi's paper, of the National University of Cuyo in Argentina, which also reminded us of the unpredictability of disasters and the need for greater understanding. "When it comes to disasters that may strike at any time, prevention cannot have a beginning and an end. What it does have is different stages, which may be more or less intense depending on circumstances."

But for all of this knowledge, the allocation of sufficient financial resources is still essential for the successful creation and implementation of

information dissemination processes and systems. Dr. Ailsa Holloway of University of Cape Town in South Africa, wrote articulately about the financial implications of disaster preparedness systems and used southern Africa as an example to highlight the danger of overlooking other perhaps more pressing drains on the national budget.

“We argue that a key justification for investments in disaster reduction is to ensure sustained economic, social and environmentally responsible development by avoiding unaffordable human, property and environmental losses caused by the interplay between natural and other forces. Yet, by focusing on future large-scale natural uncertainties, we overlook the realities of today’s risks. The risk of chronic food insecurity and hunger, the threat of armed robbery, the prospect of sexual assault, the risk of becoming another traffic fatality, the ever-present threats of HIV and Tuberculosis.”

It is clear that the media has a significant role to play in disaster preparedness and response. All media outlets have an important role and technology must be used to its fullest capabilities. But understanding this is not enough. Action is required. Local, regional and national authorities must seek to understand the needs of the media and create partnerships that allow them to provide a structured and coordinated means of distributing information in a format and style that will guarantee its widest possible exposure.

Additionally, it is the responsibility of each national authority to ensure that the clear recommendations of this conference are met, and that a national structure of information flow is established to include all levels of government down to every local authority. All groups in this team must then establish and develop strong links with all media groups to ensure that when the time comes, the message is heard.

A list of all Conference e-mails, including keynote papers, comments and discussions sent by e-mail from people around the world, messages from the organisers about participants, conference procedures and the programmes, as well as project announcements, events and publications sent by e-mail are available on the World Wide Web at <http://www.quipu.net>

The creation and successful usage, within the framework of IDNDR, of Internet conferencing, represents a major achievement in the realisation of the objectives of IDNDR, in particular in the promotion of greater awareness of the need for disaster reduction, exchange of information and technology transfer.

The IDNDR Secretariat is committed to maintaining and enhancing the use of the Internet. It is hoped that the steps taken by the IDNDR Secretariat in the field of Internet communication and the results obtained in promoting natural disaster reduction worldwide will contribute towards building a bridge into efficient disaster reduction measures in the 21st century.