75th Session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

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Theme: Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality

Statement by:

Ms. Mami Mizutori
Head of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction
Distinguished Chairperson,
Representatives of UN Member States,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak at the 75th Session of the
Economic and
Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

Ten days ago, the sixth session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk
Reduction concluded in Geneva, Switzerland.

Organized by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, the clear
message of the Global Platform was that resilience brings its own
reward, and that risk-informed investments in areas such as critical
infrastructure are essential for sustainable development.

This point is forcibly brought home by the aftermath of cyclone Fani
which struck the India state of Odisha with such force that 1.2 million
people had to be evacuated out of harm’s way earlier this month.

This was another success in terms of saving lives but the aftermath
highlighted once more how vulnerable coastal cities and towns are to
rising sea levels and extreme weather. Economic losses of over $1
billion reflect the extent of the damage to electricity supply, telecommunications and transport links.

On top of that, one estimate is that 6,000 schools and over 1,000 health facilities were damaged. Many homes were also lost in the storm.

Losses on this scale highlight the long-term effects that major disasters can have on society as a whole.

Building back better in such circumstances is not just about the infrastructure, it is also about listening and attending to the needs of the poor who lose most in these situations.

I can commend the efforts being made by the National Reconstruction Authority in Nepal to ensure that the needs of vulnerable households are not overlooked in the huge task of providing 824,000 homes to those who lost them in the 2015 earthquake.

An effort is being made to ensure that the process of reconstruction is transparent and fair to the extent that people who were not satisfied with the review of their needs can register a grievance.
To date, 437,000 grievances have been registered, resulting in 32,700 beneficiaries being added to the government list for support with reconstruction.

This is a very practical example of how to empower people and ensure inclusiveness and equality when building back better after a major disaster event.

The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the global plan to reduce disaster risk and disaster losses, recognizes clearly the need for a more people-centered, preventive approach to disaster risk.

Let me quote one sentence from paragraph 7.

“Governments should engage with relevant stakeholders, including women, children and youth, persons with disabilities, poor people, migrants, indigenous peoples, volunteers, the community of practitioners and older persons in the design and implementation of policies and plans.”

This means that disaster risk reduction strategies should target drivers of inequality and exclusion and be informed by a human rights-based
approach. Legislation and governance mechanisms should ensure the needs of the most at risk and marginalized groups are prioritized.

To date, 116 countries are reporting against the seven targets of the Sendai Framework and these include targets on reducing mortality, the numbers of people affected by disasters, economic losses and damage to critical infrastructure.

These targets are important measures of the resilience of UN Member States and they cannot be achieved without progress on target (e) which calls for a substantial increase in the number of countries with national and local strategies for disaster risk reduction.

While there are 91 countries now reporting on their progress in implementing target (e), the Co-Chairs’ Summary from the Global Platform noted that the current pace of implementation is not fast enough to meet the 2020 deadline to have these strategies in place.

So much of the world’s disaster losses are concentrated in this region that the rest of the world looks here for signs of progress in reducing disaster risk that will match the progress you have made in lifting millions out poverty.
The number of countries in Asia and the Pacific with guiding documents on disaster risk reduction is 38 and I hope that by the time UNDRR and the Government of Australia convene the Asia and Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, in Brisbane, next June, that this number will have at least doubled.

If we do not strengthen good governance in disaster risk reduction strategies which also encompass adaptation to climate change, then it will be difficult if not impossible to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Across the region, countries must also create the appropriate legal environment to ensure plans are implemented and compliance is regulated. This includes allocating a specific budget to the plan and encouraging coordination across sectors. Mechanisms must be in place to ensure sub-national authorities have the capacity and recourses to develop and implement their own plans.

The UNDRR Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific is currently conducting a region-wide review of implementation thus far of target (e) to prioritize technical assistance and support to countries that require it the most.
Working with the Member States and in coordination with the UN system, our goal is to help national and local governments achieve the paradigm shift from disaster management to risk reduction to reap the rewards of prevention and the dividends of resilience.

We congratulate the Commission on its 75th Session and look forward to strengthening our collaboration in service of the Member States for many years to come.

Thank you for your attention.