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INTERNATIONAL DECADE FOR NATURAL DISASTER REDUCTION

Letter dated 21 November 1991 from the Permanent  
Representative of Japan to the United Nations  
addressed to the Secretary-General

With reference to the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), I have the honour to transmit to Your Excellency herewith the text of the Concluding Statement of the IDNDR Summit Conference on Earthquake and Natural Disaster Countermeasures, 1991, Japan, which was held from 8 to 11 October 1991 in Tokyo.

I should be grateful if you would circulate the text of the Concluding Statement as an official document of the General Assembly under agenda item 83.

(Signed) Yoshio HATANO  
Ambassador Extraordinary  
and Plenipotentiary  
Permanent Representative of Japan  
to the United Nations

ANNEX

Concluding Statement of the International Decade for Natural  
Disaster Reduction Summit Conference on Earthquake and  
Natural Disaster Countermeasures, 1991, Japan

In observance of the second annual International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction, Japan hosted the IDNDR Summit Conference on Earthquake and Natural Disaster Countermeasures, 1991, Japan, from 8 to 11 October 1991 in Tokyo. Participating in the Conference were approximately 600 administrators, scientists and experts from 39 countries and 6 international organizations.

The participants reported on the damage caused by earthquakes and other natural disasters in various countries and cities of the world and discussed the disaster countermeasures they had taken (including prevention, preparedness, relief and recovery).

Large-scale natural disasters are having serious effects, especially on developing countries. The over-concentration of population is making cities, both in developed and developing countries, vulnerable to earthquakes, windstorms and floods. And as cities are built up further and become more complex, earthquakes may cause not only loss of life and damage to buildings but also paralysis of various urban functions and thus further setbacks to social and economic health. Recognizing that these are the problems natural disasters cause, participants in the Conference actively exchanged their views and experiences.

The natural phenomena which cause disasters will not cease, but through the efforts of the countries and cities of the world during this Decade, we shall be able to reduce the harm done to humankind and the damage to property as we approach the twenty-first century. The exchange of views and ideas at this Conference and the international network established among people engaged in disaster countermeasures will certainly contribute to the promotion of the goals of the Decade.

We who have participated in this Conference must further enhance the exchange of information, and the action plans for international exchange and cooperation for disaster prevention must be discussed in concrete terms.

In order to prevent or reduce adverse effects of natural disasters such as earthquakes, existing scientific and technical knowledge must be disseminated and applied. At the same time, we must promote the transfer of both within individual countries and between them in such a way that it can be applied to specific problems. Usually, a large-scale natural disaster does not strike the same place twice, and people quickly forget the danger. Public information activities to heighten awareness and disseminate disaster prevention knowledge are therefore important. This is a difficult task, but it must be pursued vigorously by every means possible. To cope effectively with earthquake hazards, structural and non-structural countermeasures must be

pursued in tandem, and there is a need to strengthen organizational arrangements for disaster countermeasures. There still remains much scientific research to be done in the field of earthquake prediction, but existing knowledge and information must be utilized with proper response.

We who have participated in this Conference share these views.

In the discussions that took place at each session, the problems that each country and city must address were described, and the necessity of further enhancing international cooperation pointed out. National and local governments, non-governmental organizations, private enterprises and scientific institutions must all play active roles to this end.

The following is a list of the major tasks that were identified:

1. To establish an effective method of hazard assessment, with due attention to the reactions and capabilities of the recipients and their needs and risks.
2. To devise land-use plans based on risk assessments and to provide guidelines for development plans.
3. To solve the technical barriers to the international transfer of knowledge, such as language differences.
4. To promote international joint research and knowledge transfer, taking fully into consideration the individual situations of both developed and developing countries.
5. To promote public education with regard to disaster countermeasures through the utilization of various channels and means such as the mass media, private enterprises and local organizations.
6. To raise public awareness about natural disasters among all age groups and to promote broad participation in volunteer activities for disaster countermeasures. Public education from childhood on is effective in stimulating such participation.
7. To promote the international exchange of information, prepare teaching and training materials for volunteer groups and encourage their use.
8. To establish legislative and organizational arrangements for disaster countermeasures.
9. To prepare pre-disaster hazard assessments and recovery plans based on long-term earthquake predictions and to enhance public knowledge about disasters, so that the general public will be well prepared for earthquake predictions when they are issued.

10. To exchange information on scientific data and research in the field of earthquake prediction, on the reaction of the public to earthquake predictions and on the experiences countries prone to earthquakes have had with public awareness programmes.

Through the discussions we have held at the IDNDR Summit Conference on Earthquake and Natural Disaster Countermeasures, 1991, Japan, we were able to identify these major tasks, and we regard this as another successful effort to promote the goals of the Decade. To cope with the disasters that we face, it is necessary to take immediate action based on the best knowledge currently available. We hope that this Conference will contribute positively to activities to prepare for natural disasters such as earthquakes, and that the points outlined here will be borne in mind by national and local governments, international organizations and non-governmental organizations when they implement their action programmes to promote the Decade.

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