

**OPENING STATEMENT AT THE
SYMPOSIUM ON MULTI-HAZARD EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS
FOR INTEGRATED DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT**

by

**M. Jarraud
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**Ms Margareta Wahlström, United Nations Assistant-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs,
Patricio Bernal, Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC)
and Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural
Organization (UNESCO),**

**Ms Yvette Stevens, Director of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian
Affairs (OCHA) in Geneva,**

**Mr. Johan Schaar, Senior Advisor to the Director General of the International Federation of Red
Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC),**

Mr. James Rawley, representing the United Nations Development Program (UNDP),

Mr. Saroj Kumar Jha, representing the World Bank Group,

Distinguished Guests, Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and my own, I wish to welcome you to WMO Headquarters, on the occasion of the Symposium on Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems for Integrated Disaster Risk Management.

I would like to express my appreciation to Ms Wahlström, for her presence, to the representatives of the co-sponsoring agencies, for their collaboration with WMO in the preparations leading to this Symposium, and to all the participants.

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Hazards are inevitable and threatening to everyone, but they also tend to impact harder on the most vulnerable communities, especially the developing countries and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). This situation often can cause irreparable damage and set back the economies of these societies by years, and even by decades.

From 1980 to 2005, over 7000 natural disasters worldwide have taken the lives of nearly two million people and produced economic losses over one trillion US dollars. However, as the number of disasters and their economic impacts increased during the period, the number of fatalities was diminishing. For example, for disasters related to weather-, water- and climate- related hazards, there has been nearly 4-fold increase in the number of disasters and a 5-fold increase in the economic losses, but nearly a 3-fold decrease in loss of lives. This noteworthy achievement is due to several factors, one of which is the development of specific end-to-end early warning systems.

Gradually, there has been a growing global awareness of the importance of early warning systems. During the Second World Conference on Disaster Reduction (Hyogo, Kobe, Japan, January 2005), 168 countries adopted the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 (HFA) and identified five high priority areas, of which the second stressed the need for “identifying, assessing and monitoring disaster risks and enhancing early warnings”, as a critical component of disaster risk reduction. Furthermore, the HFA stressed that disaster risk reduction must be addressed with an *integrated* and *multi-hazard* approach.

At the 2005 United Nations World Summit, held in New York last September, Governments requested the establishment of early warning systems for all natural hazards, building on existing national and regional capacities to complement broader disaster preparedness and mitigation initiatives. Opportunely, the preliminary report of the Global Survey of Early Warning Systems, which was requested by UN Secretary General, and the outcomes of the Third International Early Warning Conference, held in Bonn (Germany) in March 2006, have confirmed that, while there has been substantial progress, many gaps and challenges still remain. The Hyogo Framework for Action and the strengthened International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), which Ms Wahlström will address in her keynote speech, provide an excellent framework for all of us to work together to ensure that early warning systems are integrated as part of disaster risk reduction strategies in all countries, particularly in those with least resources.

For several years, WMO has been advocating that the emphasis in the risk management should be shifted from mitigation to prevention and preparedness. Without doubt, a fundamental pre-condition for disaster preparedness is a well-functioning early warning system, capable of delivering accurate information to the population at risk, dependably and in a timely manner. However, there still remain many challenges in ensuring that all countries are adequately equipped with technical operational capacities for monitoring and the timely provision of warnings to communities at-risk, as well as the capacity to act upon these warnings. Furthermore, education, public outreach and community-based programmes are needed to enable the public to understand the hazards and their potential impacts, and to respond effectively.

Through WMO's global operational network, which includes the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) of its 187 Members, all countries at-risk have access to tropical cyclone observations and warnings. There are many other such examples, for different hazards, demonstrating that

the integration of risk assessment and early warnings with prevention and mitigation measures can indeed permit to save many more lives and reduce damages.

Moreover, various hazard-specific early warning systems have similarities and share common elements. Enhanced integration of these systems at national and international levels contributes to the strengthening of national capacities in reducing the impacts of disasters. This requires partnerships, to identify and prioritize the actions that can be taken and to implement them building on common strengths, infrastructure and the capacities of different agencies and stakeholders.

As you are aware, the development and sustainability of effective end-to-end early warning systems are expensive and resource-intensive activities. However, a multi-hazard approach can result in enhanced operational efficiency, cost effectiveness and sustainability. The benefits of the multi-hazard approach require further study in terms of governance, organizational and operational aspects. This Symposium is a step to further explore the concept and the related potential economies and synergies, and to recommend the actions required.

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In closing, I would again wish to express WMO's appreciation to the co-sponsoring agencies and to all the participants, representing 19 countries and 18 organizations. Your presence speaks of your deep commitment to the prevention and mitigation of natural disasters. Together, we are working for a safer world.

Thank you.
