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**"Conclusions and Recommendations of the Inter-American Conference
on Natural Disaster Reduction"**

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ABSTRACT

Disasters are not more than the materialization of certain risk conditions that, in their turn, depend not only on a disturbing or shattering agent --in this case the natural or technological phenomenon-- but on vulnerability conditions that are the facilitating agents that encourage the crisis in the occurrence of the event. These social and environmental conditions are usually the result of applied development styles and of the debt which has been generated with nature due to a gestation or incubation process. In other words, disasters are unsolved problems of development, which need to be analyzed from the point of view of political economy and not only as simple facts of nature explained exclusively in a technocratic way. Vulnerability, in its different forms, is no more than a development deficiency and reflects an environmental negative balance towards which prevention efforts, from the planning point of view, must be directed in order to reduce or avoid the social, economic and environmental consequences.

This is one of the conclusions reached by the representatives of the governments of the Americas, regional and sub-regional organizations, institutions and agencies, from both governmental and non-governmental sectors, professionals, professors and researchers of public and private entities at the "Inter-American Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction", held in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, at the end of March.

The recommendations issued by the participants in the "Cartagena Statement" were the following: the preparation of techniques for monitoring and follow-up of territorial and social accumulation of vulnerabilities; the need for community involvement and their active participation; the undertaking of studies on disasters involving social, technical and scientific aspects and the interaction of civil society with government agencies; the stimulation of educational programs to make prevention part of culture; the formation of networks of institutions and documentation centers; the strengthening of organizational and administrative disaster prevention and assistance systems in the context of decentralization and participation of civil society; the emphasis on prevention rather than on emergency assistance; the need for international organizations to

prevention rather than on emergency assistance; the need for international organizations to encourage horizontal cooperation and for world and regional financial agencies to establish and apply financing policies that support initiatives for disaster prevention and mitigation in the region.

As result of the exchange of experiences and thoughts on the openings offered by the IDNDR not only to attract the interest of science and technology but to create political and administrative will and acceptance by the communities of disaster reduction purposes, the Cartagena Statement is focused, in brief, upon the fact that vulnerability reduction must be an explicit purpose of planning for sustainable development.

THE INTER-AMERICAN CONFERENCE

The National Directorate for Risk Mitigation and Disaster Preparedness of Colombia, identified with the aims of the IDNDR and given the efforts being made in each country to reduce the impact of natural and technological disasters, called the "Inter-American Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction" in order to contribute to strengthen disaster prevention and to promote the objectives of the Decade. Thus, it provided room for greater exchanges of knowledge and information on a continental level, and opened the doors to greater cooperation. During the conference, participation was open and there was no charge made for it. Almost 1.200 delegates came from all over the Americas, mainly to exchange experiences and to promote horizontal technical cooperation and to contribute as a forum in preparation for the World Conference.

Prior to the event, the Colombian government used diplomatic channels to consult all the focal points of the IDNDR National Committees and made direct contact with institutions and individuals throughout the Americas on progress made and problems experienced in each country during these early years of the Decade, and recommendations as to how to make action more effective in future. Based on replies obtained, and noting the content of the 65 papers sent in by contributing speakers, and the preliminary comments on the text of those attending the Conference, a synthesis was made of the most significant and novel topics as a body of conclusions and recommendations, which were included in the "Cartagena Statement".

COLOMBIA'S VIEW

To assert that the problem of disasters has grown is neither new nor open to doubt. Events throughout the world demonstrate this. Nor do we need to stress the fact that the effect of these kind of events on developing countries and on less developed ones is much more severe and more difficult to handle than in the first world countries. Indeed, the quantification and analysis of economic damage suffered are studies which repeat the need of focusing the problem more carefully and with more concern. Deep down, these studies show something which we all know to be true.

To make a synthesis from the beginning, we could say that the more serious effect of disasters in the countries of the so-called Third World is not only due to the existence of natural or technological hazards but essentially to their condition of under development.

Without entering into a discussion of what development is or should be and accepting for discussion purposes the widely-known paradigms used to measure development level by means of indexes such as GNP per capita, decent housing; quality of, and access to, public services; literacy and educational level achievement; calorie intake available; incidence of health problems; life expectancy at birth; citizen security; political participation; autonomy. It can be said that trying to achieve high levels in the mentioned indexes implies some cost, and such cost means, in many circumstances, that there are winners and losers. On a world scale, there are countries which progress at the expense of others; and on a domestic scale, some sectors benefit at the expense of others. When both conditions are together, that is to say the losers -country and population- the problem is greater and solution is more difficult and complex.

Latin America and the Caribbean have struggled during 500 years or more to improve their inhabitants life quality, with inequalities both at domestic and international scale. There have been centuries of domination, incapability, inefficiency and difficulty some innate, others imposed by the ruling economic and political systems. We can never ignore that some progress has been, but at the same time the cost has somehow been very high, and the problems have brought about new and more complex situations.

Some of those costs have been the rapid and irrational growth of many urban centers; the uncontrolled industrialization; the excessive use of renewable and non-renewable natural resources; the lack of control over farming techniques; the short-term culture; the growing chasm between rich and poor; political backwardness or even chaos and the absence of citizen participation.

Although the consequences of these costs can be perceived in many other areas, in the field of natural disasters it can be directly reflected in the increased vulnerability of people to defend themselves against natural and technological hazards. This vulnerability is physical, economic, social and cultural. Irreversible damage to the environment and other damage which can only be repaired by means of long term actions have their cost. Paradoxes of progress and development.

According to the forecasts of global and regional financial agencies, many of the developing countries will double their urban population in the next 30 years. This shall mean a dramatic increase in vulnerability as a result of urban disorder, difficulties in the provision of public services and due to the industrialization process. A balanced process that may be interpreted as sustainable development will be possible only if prevention criteria are included in physical planning (urban and/or territorial), in sector and socioeconomic planning and if prospective models of indexes are established that enable the detection of possible crisis by early warnings.

The reduction in vulnerability must explicitly be an aim of development, in the sense that development must improve not only the conditions but also the quality of life and social welfare. Above the level of discussion between Neoliberals and Social Democrats, the purposes of development must be to meet the needs of man and his environment and the growth with quality.

Security is a basic component of sustainable human growth, and a reduction in vulnerability is therefore a basic strategy to achieve a fair balance between human settlement and nature.

The reduction in the impact of disasters must first be approached by concerted and determined action to improve or change the development style or model, which should be addressing the improvement of the quality of life for all, while at the same time trying to reduce vulnerabilities and to seek balance between the needs of progress and preservation of the environment.

So it is that the Cartagena Statement calls for concerted action, accepting the validity of technical and scientific considerations as necessary, but not sufficient. The Statement stresses that there is a close relationship between bad management of the environment and an increase in the number of disasters; that there is a direct relationship between poverty and negative impact (loss of life and goods) of natural phenomena; that there is a direct relationship between cultural imagery and vulnerability to natural forces. There is a philosophical dilemma concerning the role of man on the earth: Are we its masters, or are we part of it?

Colombia's view, based on the considerations of the countries of the Americas included in the "Cartagena Statement", made available to this World Conference, can be summarized as follows:

- a. The knowledge, monitoring and analysis of natural hazards is a necessary condition in order to reduce the impact of disasters, but is not in itself sufficient.
- b. The vulnerability situation of the population will be reduced by improving its living conditions. That is to say, in order to reduce the impact of disasters, the state of under development of the countries must be overcome, particularly poverty conditions.
- c. The reduction of those vulnerabilities, understood as part of the development process of the countries, cannot be achieved at the expense of environmental deterioration which will only accentuate existing vulnerabilities, or create new ones. Therefore, there is no alternative besides seeking the balance between the adopted development model and environmental conservation.
- d. Special emphasis must be given to vulnerability in urban areas, particularly in those countries where cities continue to grow fast and planning and controls are overcome by reality, stressing and increasing the vulnerabilities of an increasing number of people.
- e. A community facing any natural hazard must be aware of such hazard, and must have enough knowledge to live with it.
- f. The decentralization model on analysis and decision-making is a necessary condition for the true participation of the community and the local authorities. The responsibility of reducing the impact of natural and technological phenomena is multi-sector and inter-institutional. This task requires commitment from governments, community, private sector, political sector, NGOs and international community. The autonomy of local communities and its authorities must be an explicit strategy to obtain intervention effective results.

- g. The international community and the bilateral and multilateral agencies and organizations must support the national initiatives and facilitate the exchange of information and promote the horizontal technical cooperation between the countries which must develop similar strategies in hazard analysis, risk mitigation and reduction of vulnerabilities.

In other words, the basic elements of a policy that includes the principles of ecological, social, cultural and economic sustainable development must be: the explicit planning as an instrument of prevention and regulation of the use of environment and resources; technological response as efficiency instrument and as a complementary resource for the appropriate transformation and modeling of nature; education and information as instruments to imbue culture and responsibility; community organization and participation as an instrument to adapt and mold society on a democratic basis; and the legal and juridical acts as ruling and controlling instrument of the rights, duties and activities of man in the environment.

As a final consideration, we want to say that although many societies in under developed countries are living in premodern conditions, in Latin America and the Caribbean modernism and even conditions of post modernism are affecting in many aspects of their dynamics of growth and development. Facing these characteristics of change, fragmentation and fleeting images, less rigid planning models need to be stated to include adequately the uncertainties, instabilities and surprises common to the region. This means a dynamic planning with early or advanced warning techniques of the social environment conditions not only of the disturbing agents; in other words, a preventive and prospective view in order to achieve a sustainable development.

CARTAGENA STATEMENT

The representatives of the governments of the Americas, regional and sub-regional government and non-government organizations, institutions and agencies, and professionals, professors and researchers of public and private entities, gathered in Cartagena de Indias, Colombia, from March 21 to 24, 1994, for the "Inter-American Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction", considering the results obtained during the first years of the "International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction - IDNDR", discussed several issues summarized in the following conclusions and recommendations that will be put to the consideration of all the agencies of this region and of the participants at the World Conference to be held in Yokohama, Japan, from May 23 to 27, 1994:

- 1. Disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean are a growing problem and their impact is increasing as a result of the development styles and models prevailing in the region. Population and urban growth, land occupation patterns, the impoverishment of large segments of the population, the use of inadequate organizational systems, and pressures on natural resources have led to people becoming increasingly vulnerable in the face of a wide variety of natural hazards.*
- 2. In general, countries in the region have focused their efforts, in the context of the IDNDR, on the study of natural hazards and on the development of technical solutions, but no*

significant progress has been made in terms of devising solutions that are socially, culturally or economically applicable or appropriate.

3. *Although important technical developments have been accomplished, many of the solutions proposed using this approach have seldom been applied in practice given the limited availability of resources and the lack of knowledge of local rationalities which could permit an alternative way of managing those resources. Sometimes technical solutions are rejected by people themselves because they do not fit in with their own perception of risk or their imagery of disasters.*
4. *Disasters should be understood as an unresolved problem of development in the sense that they are not natural events *per se* but rather situations resulting from the relationship between nature and society's structure and organization. Urban and regional development policies, as well as economic and social policies in general do not take into account the problem of disasters and at times actually enhance vulnerability. There are few cases in which the concepts of prevention and mitigation have been considered as part of the development plans of the countries of the region.*
5. *Most of the government agencies or systems established in the region for the purpose of risk reduction and disaster preparedness have not been effective due to a lack of political will and to the fact that they focus mainly on response and relief in cases of emergency and not on the systematic and organic implementation of prevention or mitigation actions. The majority of these agencies are based on centralized models that do not adequately involve local forms of power such as local governments, community organizations or other manifestations of civil society.*
6. *Disaster prevention as an explicit strategy for sustainable development has not been promoted openly within the context of the IDNDR. Consequently, the region has been lacking an effective articulation between preventive and mitigation activities and environmental management and protection, despite the fact that in order to harmonize the natural ecosystem with the society that occupies it and exploits it, it is necessary to control and guide man's action on the environment and vice versa.*
7. *Notwithstanding the above limitations, the IDNDR has created interest and attracted the attention of a large number of countries, international agencies and donor organizations to the subject of disasters. As a result of this initiative, several governments, organizations and institutions in the region have promoted projects and programs that have already yielded positive results in the areas of health and education and have helped reduce vulnerability of productive infrastructure. They have also encouraged the formation of national and sub-regional institutions and the production and dissemination of technical and scientific information.*

In view of the above, the participants to the Inter-American Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction agree to promote and apply the following recommendations within the scope of their activities:

1. *To take advantage of the IDNDR as an opportunity and motive not only to attract the interest of the scientific and technological community but to create political and administrative will and public acceptance of goals generated by the local and national authorities, where the role of the international agencies will be to act as facilitators and advisers for the activities developed not only by government organizations but also by other parts of society that have been successful leaders in the area of disaster prevention.*
2. *Considering that vulnerability is a developmental deficiency and reflects a negative environmental balance, it is important to encourage a political will that recognizes the reduction of vulnerability as a clear objective in all plans for sustainable development and as an additional indicator in environmental accounting. Monitoring and follow-up techniques to identify territorial and social accumulation of vulnerabilities must be considered as essential tools for disaster prevention and mitigation.*
3. *Community involvement and their active participation are mandatory in order to gain greater insight into the individual and collective perception of development and risk, and to have a clearer understanding of the cultural and organizational characteristics of each society as well as of its behavior and interactions with the physical and natural environment. This knowledge is of utmost importance to determine those things that favor and hinder prevention and mitigation, or encourage or limit the preservation of the environment for the development of future generations, and in order to find effective and efficient means to reduce the impact of disasters in the region.*
4. *It is important to undertake studies on disasters involving technical, scientific and social aspects and the interaction of civil society with government agencies, in order to translate technical instruments into effective disaster prevention and response policies.*
5. *Given the validity and significance of the cultural dimension in relation to disasters, it is important to strengthen and promote educational programs for the population and training schemes to enable researchers, planners, experts and officials to gain a wide range of knowledge adjusted to the distinct realities in the region. This, in order to make prevention part of culture.*
6. *Considering the importance of exchanging experiences and the need to have the largest amount of information possible, it is crucial to foster the creation of institutional networks and quick access to existing technical and educational information, expanding national and regional centers or mechanisms under a multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral approach.*
7. *Organizational and administrative disaster prevention and response systems must be strengthened and adapted to the reality of the disasters affecting the region. This means, among other things, decentralizing the relevant government agencies, facilitating the participation of civil society, and adopting a preventive approach instead of merely a reactive one.*

8. *Bearing in mind that the implementation and evaluation of national and local disaster prevention and response model projects are proof of the practical effectiveness of the organizational and administrative systems and of the technical instruments employed, these experiences and techniques should be documented and analyzed as a way of generating new knowledge and of formulating and adjusting the policies of the countries and of the bilateral and multilateral organizations in the region.*
9. *It is very important for the international agencies, the organizations and the donors not only to provide support in the areas of relief and disaster preparedness, but also to encourage and facilitate horizontal cooperation and the exchange of experiences among countries, institutions and researchers in the region, so as to promote the exchange of information and techniques and the development of mutual support and learning processes for disaster reduction, prevention and preparedness.*
10. *Parliaments in the region must encourage the creation of disaster committees and formulate legal and political frameworks to create or update specific legislation for prevention, mitigation and response, as well as to establish policies and strategies to ensure the viability of the IDNDR initiatives. The ministries of foreign affairs should also play a leading role in promoting and channeling international cooperation among countries sharing similar purposes.*
11. *Global and regional financial institutions must establish and apply financing policies designed to support disaster prevention and mitigation and to encourage the inclusion of these aspects into regional and national development programs.*

Cartagena de Indias, March 24, 1994