

THE INTERAMERICAN CONFERENCE ON DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Reflections and proposals for improving the effectiveness of risk management
November 17, 18, 19, Manizales, Colombia.

THE MANIZALES DECLARATION

During the “Interamerican Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction” held in Manizales, Colombia between the 17th and 19th of November 2004, representatives of governmental and non governmental, regional and sub regional agencies and organisations, professionals, researchers and teachers from private and public universities and interested members of the public and press met as “world citizens” to discuss and reflect on the issues of disaster risk and risk management. Considering the prior agreements reached during the 1994 Interamerican Conference held in Cartagena de Indias and the Yokohama World Conference on the Reduction of Natural Disasters, the following considerations, conclusions and recommendations emerged from this latest venue. These points constitute an input into the agenda of regional institutions and agencies, and a key message to the participants at the 2nd World Conference on Disaster Reduction to be held in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan between the 18th and 22nd of January, 2005:

1. Coinciding paradoxically with the celebration of the U.N. International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction between 1990 and 1999, the world was witness to some of the most dramatic and costly disasters in history. These disasters revealed multiple dimensions of the risk construction process, including the role played by environmental degradation and the impacts of poverty and social exclusion. Moreover, they also demonstrated the ways in which time and history contribute to the configuration of risk conditions that many times take decades, if not centuries, to materialize in real impacts and losses.
2. The Declaration of Cartagena de Indias and the Yokohama Message of 1994 greatly contributed to an understanding of the risk and disaster problematic and marked important conceptual changes. The conclusions and recommendations of these meetings are still valid and should not be forgotten given that current evidence suggests that risks and disasters have not been reduced in any significant way, but rather tend to increase and will increase even further during the coming years and decades. The appearance of new –and at times unknown– risk factors indicates that future societies will be witnesses and key actors in new and even more complex disasters. New risk scenarios are being generated as a result of the interaction between global climate change, the appearance of new socio-natural hazards and the financial and economic impacts associated with globalization and free trade.
3. The loss of life is not the only or necessarily the best indicator of disaster occurrence. The evidence suggests that risk and disaster are continually increasing in terms of the number of affected, the volume of economic and social losses and the coping difficulties with recovery experienced by impacted communities, whilst, on the other hand, the number of associated deaths has dropped proportionally over the last decades. Thus, it is clear that despite the fact that the concept of integrated risk management has been adopted by more and more

governments, in practice, the majority of resources made available and the greatest degree of effort are still being invested in disaster preparedness and response. Clearly, real decisions have yet to be taken to assign priorities in the political, social and economic agenda geared to the effective reduction of risk generating factors.

4. During the last few years, important changes have been achieved in the concept of disaster prevention and in the role assigned to the State, the private sector and civil society. As a result, it has become clear that risk management, as part of a gamut of human rights to the protection of life, livelihood and property, is the undeniable and obligatory responsibility of the State. Moreover, common citizens have the duty and obligation to demand protection and to participate actively and decisively in creating the conditions that make this socially and politically feasible.

Taking the aforementioned considerations into account, the participants at the Interamerican Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction commit themselves to promoting the following recommendations and request their careful consideration on the part of governmental and non governmental representatives at the Kobe conference:

1. Risk management is an essential and integral component of Sustainable Human Development as part of a universal agenda that promotes increases in human wellbeing. Although this principle was made clear at Cartagena and Yokohama in 1994, in reality there is today an unfortunate conceptual and operational separation between development policy and risk management. In order to overcome this artificial separation, we must guarantee that risk management is recognized and incorporated as an essential element in development practice. Achievement of the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) will only be possible with the effective articulation of risk management with development planning and practice.

2. Today, there exists a consolidated and validated body of theory and knowledge on integral risk management, both in terms of contents and implementation methods. Notwithstanding, in general terms, this body of knowledge has not been translated in any real and effective manner in the decisions that determine the direction to be taken by development. Solutions have been partial and puntual to date and their effectivity and coverage at the regional and world levels is very incipient. Experiences with the implementation of good practices should be recognised and more widely disseminated. However, it is necessary to transcend the promotion of measures that are many times an exception to the rule, and convert risk management into the central paradigm for the achievement of an harmonious coexistence between communities and their environment.

3. New challenges are arising for risk management, associated with the complex problems of economic globalization, free trade, international migration, and the displacement of population due to armed conflict and mega infrastructure projects, among other causes. The vicious circle of social exclusion is increasing the vulnerability of marginalised populations thus increasing risk factors in many countries of the Latin American region. Present rules governing international economic relations and the new world economic order must be

examined from the political, social, economic and environmental perspectives of risk reduction.

4. Global environmental change is also exacerbating existing hazards and new risk scenarios are being constructed in the majority of countries. These risk scenarios are related to complex processes of environmental degradation, unplanned urbanization, and inadequately controlled technological developments. This situation demands prospective risk management procedures that privilege responsible risk prevention and mitigation in development investment decisions and in post disaster impact rehabilitation and reconstruction processes.

5. Synergies between the risk management agenda and the international environmental agendas relating to climate change, desertification, biological diversity and wetlands, amongst others, must be explored and taken advantage of.

6. Taking advantage of the 2nd World Conference on Disaster Reduction to be celebrated in Kobe in January 2005, a new international commitment must be achieved through the establishment of a binding agreement with precise implementation goals as regards the reduction of risk conditions that permits the monitoring, measurement and follow up as regards risk reduction performance in the countries. The implementation of these commitments will allow the strengthening of regional, national and local capacities for facing present and future risk conditions.

7. Faced with the argument that risk reduction is excessively expensive when seen from a cost benefit perspective, it is important to remember that other non economic criteria exist for evaluating prevention and mitigation measures. Poor population will never come out on the right side of the cost benefit equation. Other relevant approaches exist that derive from ethical and human rights perspectives, stimulating solidarity and mutual compensation between different sectors of society. Therefore, risk reduction should be seen as a wise investment and not just as a cost.

8. Risk may be represented in many different ways, according to its scale and economic, social, political and environmental dimensions. Therefore, efforts must be greatly improved in order to develop indicators that are appropriate for expressing the multiple facets of risk at all different scales. Efforts must be made to better transmit the multiple dimensions of risk to different social actors, to generate a common language and to educate future generations as regards risk and the ways to reduce it, taking into account that macro level solutions at the international level are not sufficient to reduce risk at the local levels.

9. Effective risk management requires governance conditions that allow and promote the allocation of responsibilities and obligations and the transparent implementation of risk management policies. Consequently, a broad-based democratic participation of civil society is required through social empowerment and decentralised management perspective with legitimate organizations. Moreover, private sector involvement in risk reduction must be fostered creating incentives for the strengthening of social and environmental responsibility.

10. Risk management is an inherent and ineludible responsibility of the State. Both risk and risk management performance require monitoring and follow-up mechanisms that allow us to observe tendencies, identify achievements and good practice and denounce negligence, corruption and other conditions that perpetuate risk conditions. In order to be able to monitor risk and risk management, a system of cross checks and balances must be developed through the establishment of control and regulation and transparency in public management organisations, as well as through governance networks that strengthen public risk management at the global, national and sub-national levels.

Manizales, November 19, 2004.