

# Regional Platform for Disaster Reduction in the Americas

## Concept Paper

1<sup>st</sup> Session of the UNISDR HFA Regional Platform of the Americas  
Panama City, Panama  
March 17-19, 2009

### Introduction

The purpose of this concept paper is to present an overview of the context leading up to the 1<sup>st</sup> Session of the UNISDR Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) Regional Platform of the Americas, and present thematic material to prepare for discussions at that first session covering implementation of the HFA at varying levels. The results of those discussions will further enrich the preparation of the **Report Surrounding the Commitments and Initiatives to Support the Implementation of the HFA from a Regional Perspective** with a view towards the 2<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Global Platform to be held in Geneva, on June 17-19, 2009.

The UNISDR HFA Regional Platform of the Americas is intended to serve as the overarching and permanent forum for the exchange of information and knowledge, and the coordination of efforts throughout the region, for providing advocacy for effective action to reduce disasters, for expanding the political space devoted to the issue, and for contributing to the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action.<sup>1</sup>

### Context

The United Nations' ISDR Secretariat, through its Regional Unit for the Americas (UNISDR The Americas), was identified as the main driving force to catalyze the process with the

---

<sup>1</sup> Within the region of the Americas, a Preliminary Regional Consultation Meeting was held in June of 2006 in preparation for the First Session of the Global Platform held in June 2007. At that meeting, participants stressed the importance of a Regional Platform for Disaster Reduction for bringing together existing coordination mechanisms at both regional and sub-regional levels, as well as for linking national efforts to the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action. It was concluded that a regional platform is the logical extension of national and global platforms, as well as a necessary element for strengthening and consolidating national and global efforts towards the implementation of the HFA. The Regional Platform will facilitate cross-fertilization between countries and sub-regions through promoting shared knowledge, lessons learnt, and regional and multilateral agreement, while helping to ensure sharing of disaster reduction information, planning and joint problem-solving with UN agencies, NGOs and Governments through strengthened collaboration and cooperation, the creation and/or strengthening of national, sub-regional and thematic platforms in the context of disaster risk reduction with adequate and useful supporting tools and instruments for their proper functioning. Furthermore, it is anticipated that the Regional Platform of the Americas will accelerate the integration of disaster risk reduction in priority areas of work, including urban risk, climate change, communications and education. Finally, it will allow for the review, validation and adoption of the reporting mechanism currently being devised by UNISDR, the importance of reporting by national governments, and a look at the regional reports intended as inputs to the Global Platform and Global Assessment Report. This will strengthen solidarity and cooperation among nations and consolidate progress and trends from the perspective of the region as a whole.

key function of coordinating and ensuring active participation and convening of key players from throughout the region.<sup>2</sup>

The General Secretariat of the Organization of American States, through its Executive Secretariat for Integral Development and its Department of Sustainable Development (DSD/OAS), has been identified as the main strategic political partner / regional institution to coordinate HFA implementation<sup>3</sup>, and as such is taking the lead role with the UNISDR The Americas in establishing the UNISDR HFA Regional Platform of the Americas, co-convening its 1<sup>st</sup> Session, and preparing the Regional Report.

Other key partners include the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)<sup>4</sup> and The World Bank.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, it should be noted that the countries of the Americas have led the way in undertaking actions through binding commitments to address disaster risk reduction issues. Along with the countries' adoption of the HFA at the global level, they have adopted the Inter-American Strategic Plan for Policy on Vulnerability Reduction, Risk Management and Disaster Response (AG/Res.1955 (XXXIII-O/03)) (IASP) as the regional intergovernmental guidance for disaster risk reduction. Later the countries of the hemisphere established the Inter-American Network for Disaster Mitigation (INDM), assigning it the unique position, "...as the permanent hemispheric mechanism for strengthening practical cooperation among intergovernmental agencies in the area of disaster reduction, especially by sharing technical information and best practices" (AG/Res. 2314 (XXXVII-O/07)).

---

<sup>2</sup> The International Strategy for Disaster Reduction of the United Nations (UNISDR) is a multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder platform to enable societies to increase their resilience to natural, technological and environmental disasters and to reduce associated environmental, human, economic and social losses. In keeping with the mandate of the UNISDR secretariat as the focal point in the United Nations system for the coordination of disaster reduction initiatives and with the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) as the main orienting tool, UNISDR's Regional Unit for the Americas (UNISDR Americas) strives to promote synergies and partnerships among the different stakeholders, State entities and non-government institutions to promote disaster risk reduction as an integral part of planning, policy and decision-making at all levels. It provides support to actors from throughout the region in promoting a culture of disaster prevention and contributing to build disaster resilient nations and communities through political advocacy, capacity-building, technical assistance and coordination.

<sup>3</sup> The Department of Sustainable Development (OAS/DSD) is the principal technical arm of the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (GS/OAS), responsible for meeting the needs of OAS member States in matters of sustainable development and environment. In keeping with OAS' mandate as the main political body in the Western Hemisphere for promoting social and economic development through cooperation, OAS/DSD supports the formulation, design and execution of policies and technical cooperation projects that help translate the goals of sustainable development and environment protection into concrete action. A key objective of this work involves natural disaster risk management as an essential component for development.

<sup>4</sup> Supporting sustainable development, reducing poverty and providing humanitarian assistance, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) is the Canadian Government's lead agency for development assistance. Through CIDA, Canada provides support to the UNISDR and other key international disaster risk reduction in support of the [HFA](#).

<sup>5</sup> In June 2006, the World Bank's Board of Directors endorsed the establishment of the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR), a longer term partnership under the ISDR system to reduce disaster losses by mainstreaming disaster risk reduction in development, particularly upstream country strategies and processes, towards fulfillment of principal goals of the Hyogo Framework of Action (HFA).

During the 1<sup>st</sup> Session of the Global Platform (June 2007), the UNISDR and the GS/OAS signed a cooperation agreement for advancing the implementation of the HFA in the Americas and the IASP and later a follow-up cooperation agreement between the parties (August 2008) on the joint execution of the Regional Platform for the implementation of the HFA in the Americas. It is in this context that the 1<sup>st</sup> Session of the Regional Platform of the Americas is taking place.

## **Objectives**

The first biennial session of the Regional Platform of the Americas will focus on the following elements of HFA and IASP implementation:

- Reviewing and analyzing existing instruments at the hemispheric level within the Inter-American System to support and advance implementation of the HFA implementation;
- Identifying overlaps and potential discrepancies between the UNISDR HFA and the OAS IASP, so as to draw recommendation for better alignment of the OAS IASP with the UNISDR HFA;
- Establishing a common reporting process for the UNISDR HFA Regional Platform and the OAS IASP; and
- Reviewing existing instruments and arrangements between the sub-regional and hemispheric inter-governmental organizations (IGO), so as to identify each organization's value added and areas of competence, needs for capacity building, and needs for supplementary arrangements including legal, administrative, technical and financial instruments for promoting synergies and inter-agency cooperation across all levels from hemispheric to regional, national and local levels.

In keeping with the objectives of the Platform structure and in preparation for the June 2009 Global Platform session, the Regional Platform of the Americas will have the following objectives:

- Increase the profile of disaster risk reduction as an integral aspect of sustainable development and adaptation to climate change, recognizing that it is "everybody's business" and must be a multi-stakeholder undertaking with governments playing a central role;
- Reiterate the commitment of policy and decision-makers to implement the Hyogo Framework for Action;
- Learn from good practice;
- Provide practical suggestions for regional and sub-regional initiatives in support of national and community efforts to reduce disaster risk; and
- Assess progress made in implementing the HFA, and identify obstacles, critical problems and emerging issues that must be addressed to speed up national and local implementation of disaster risk reduction including the priorities of the ISDR system for 2008-2009.

Specific objectives of this session will therefore include the following:

1. Promote the consolidation and institutionalization of the Regional Platform of the Americas, including the necessary political agreements, resolutions and plans of action;
2. Promote coordination of efforts and creation of new partnerships and/or strengthen existing ones for HFA and IASP implementation of HFA and IASP;
3. Foster understanding of the HFA reporting mechanism to enhance feedback, to validate and appropriate the mechanism to facilitate improved and more

systematized reporting throughout the region, and to support the strengthening of National Platforms;

4. Identify specific opportunities for cross-fertilization between countries and sub-regions for exchanging information, as well as inter-government and inter-sector cooperation; and
5. Disseminate the main outcomes of the meeting with respect to their risk trends and progress through the Internet by the UNISDR secretariat, the INDM Web Portal, and the ISDR and INDM partners and supporters.

As a key element to the follow-up activities from this first Regional Platform Session, both the UNISDR secretariat Regional Unit for the Americas and the OAS/DSD will be actively involved in calling upon relevant UN and OAS specialized agencies to strengthen the Regional Platform process according to their thematic, geographical and institutional capacities and mandates. The ACS, CDERA, CEPREDENAC and CAPRADE in their pivotal role as intergovernmental agencies at the subregional level will be expected to actively participate in promoting this structure in the Caribbean, Central America and South America respectively, encouraging the active participation of governments and other agencies, thus serving to bridge the gap even further between the global, regional and national platforms.

Strengthening of national platforms is necessarily another key element of this process. The 1<sup>st</sup> Session of the Regional Platform as well as the Regional Platform itself will serve to reinforce the importance of this process at the national level.

Thematic sessions and workshops surrounding topics of interest to the region include the following:

- Utilizing the Inter-American System (disaster risk reduction, reporting, coordination and dissemination);
- Collective, collaborative risk reduction to climate hazards, change, and variability;
- Sector-specific initiatives with participation of public and private sector actors (agriculture, education, energy, health, transportation, water and sanitation);
- Communications and Information Technologies (ICTs) and the role of the media;
- Hazard identification, monitoring, assessment, and early warning;
- Disaster risk reduction policy, legislation and constitutional reform;
- Sub-regional initiatives (Caribbean, Central America and South America in particular);
- Risk management (financial, economic and physical risk responsibility, accountability, mitigation and transfer mechanisms);
- Risk reduction reporting (the UNISDR secretariat HFA system, OAS mandates, focal points and official contact agencies); and
- Strengthening national platforms (including focal points).

The Regional Report will contribute to the discussions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Session of the Regional Platform by looking at trends, specific progress, gaps, challenges and opportunities. Both existing mechanisms for progress and for monitoring progress as well as identification of proposed mechanisms will be covered. The emphasis is to identify the way forward, building on the existing agreements and initiatives. National and sub-regional reports and input from their preparatory processes on initiatives and institutional arrangements for coordination of actions through ACS, CAPRADE, CEPREDENAC and CDERA, as well as areas of concern and suggestions for future actions will underlie the report contents.