

**Second Hemispheric Encounter**  
**National Mechanisms and Networks for Risk Reduction**  
**“Encounter of Santa Marta: from Theory to Practice”**

**Background Document**

**14-16 April, 2010**  
**Santa Marta, Colombia**

**INTRODUCTION:**

Over the last few decades, natural events of catastrophic consequences have increased in frequency and intensity. This is particularly true in the case of hydrometeorological events, in part due to climate change. These events have had significant negative impacts on the populations and economies, at both national and local levels, for both developed and developing countries.

Our hemisphere is not an exception; on the contrary, the region is continuously exposed to natural hazards that often result in disasters, due to its particular geographic location that places a large number of in the “Pacific Ring of Fire” and in the middle of the oceans, resulting in higher exposure to natural hazards.

Geographic location and accumulated risk make the region prone to the incidence of a significant number of natural hazards, such as hurricanes and tropical storms, earthquakes, floods, droughts, landslides, and volcanic eruptions, among others, which cause serious damages to the population and these countries’ productive and economic infrastructure.

Development processes that do not take into consideration this variety of risks, coupled with factors such as high population growth, the acceleration of urbanization, environmental degradation, and poverty indices, among other socio-economic factors, all contribute to generating higher levels of vulnerability.

Indeed, the 2008 Atlantic hurricane season was above average. There were 16 tropical storms, eight of which were upgraded to hurricanes, with five that reached the maximum strength. Each month of 2008, except June, saw a category 4 or 5 hurricane in the region, intensifying from June onward.<sup>1</sup>

All of these natural events translated into considerable damages and losses. For instance, Belize’s rice, tourism, and petroleum sectors were gravely affected. The Dominican Republic suffered heavy landslides and associated innumerable deaths. Haiti in particular suffered the highest number of events, as hurricanes passed over its territory.<sup>2</sup> Cuba’s infrastructure and agriculture also suffered due to three hurricanes.

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<sup>1</sup> XIV Ordinary Meeting of Cabinet Ministers from the Association of Caribbean States. Report from the Special Committee Chair on Disaster Risk Reduction. Port-au-Prince, Republic of Haiti.

<sup>2</sup> During 2008, Haiti was hit by all five of the tropical storms that were upgraded to hurricane status.

Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Mexico, Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras all battled floods during the most intense rainy season in several years.

The Andean region, characterized by its geographic contrasts and its particular processes for occupation and land use, experienced a series of large magnitude disasters, as well as another series of smaller scale but higher occurrence events, that drastically impacted the development of the countries in the region. The impacts of disasters in this region are evidence of the higher risk levels observed in the Andean countries, which are associated with their development models and processes.

The Andean region, which possesses 95 percent of the world's tropical glaciers, has been losing much of the potential of its natural resources due to global warming. In the Southern part of the continent, both Chile and Argentina are witnessing the recession of the Patagonian glaciers, which have lost 5% of their 17,500 square kilometers in the last 50 years, a phenomenon clearly pointing to the effects of climate change. Chile, Argentina, and Brazil have also all suffered great losses due to extreme droughts and floods.

The current situation in these hemispheric countries demonstrate a need to specifically focus on a unified regional approach to best practices and experiences focusing on these themes, and to give special priority to the development of coordination and cooperation mechanisms to evolve from theory to practice.

#### OBJECTIVES:

The Encounter's main objective is to foster an exchange of successful experiences and best practices in the area of Disaster Risk Management (DRM) and Climate Change Adaptation (CCA), as implemented by existing National Mechanisms and Networks. The ultimate goal is to advance the establishment and strengthening of National Platforms for Disaster Risk Reduction under the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA).

The Encounter also seeks to lay the groundwork for the establishment of a regional mechanism that will enable findings and experiences to reach those in need and to strengthen cooperation between the countries in the region, regional and international organizations, as well as agencies for bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the area of DRM and CCA.

#### PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE MEETING:

This Encounter of good practices will focus on National Mechanisms for Disaster Risk Management, while it will examine their linkages and coordination mechanisms with both Regional and Global Systems, as well as with provincial, departmental, and local systems.

The Encounter is organized in the context of the process of the *Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Americas*, and forms an integral part of this process. The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Colombian National System for Disaster Prevention and Response offers the perfect occasion to review the main achievements (in disaster risk reduction) of the last 20 years for the Colombian Government, as well as for the other countries in the hemisphere.

### AUDIENCE AND PARTICIPANTS:

The principal audience for the Encounter consists of principal government institutions from each country in matters of Disaster Risk Management and Adaptation to Climate Change. Participants will also include representatives from other sectors, namely finance, development planning, health, education, as well as representatives from both public and private productive and service sectors, namely agriculture, energy, transport, and water and sanitation.

Participants will also include experts and officials from programs and projects belonging to regional intergovernmental organizations – including CEPREDENAC, CAPRADE, CDEMA, ACS and MERCOSUR, international cooperative organizations, development banks, as well as bilateral and multilateral donors.

In addition, the Encounter will include NGOs, the academic sector, as well as specialists in information and communication, in order to cover the desired scope. Representatives from these groups will serve as rapporteurs and moderators for the thematic sessions, in conjunction with specialists from the different organizations mentioned above.

### ORGANIZERS AND SPONSORS:

The Encounter is being convened by the Government of Colombia, the General Secretariat of the Organization of American States (GS/OAS), and the secretariat of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR).

The agencies of the United Nations and the Inter-American Systems are all invited, as are other intergovernmental and sub-regional organizations - CEPREDENAC, CAPRADE, CDEMA, MERCOSUR, and ACS, to co-sponsor the event and support the organization of the various thematic sessions, by means of experts and case studies identification.

The Government of Colombia, through its Directive Office for Risk Management of the Ministry for the Interior and Justice, provides logistical support for the organization, preparation, and presentation of the event.

GS/OAS, through the Department of Sustainable Development and its Inter-American Network for Disaster Mitigation (INDM), provides financial support for the participation of one representative from each of the 33 participating Member States of the OAS, as well as conference costs.

UNISDR provides financial support for the participation of representatives from intergovernmental and sub-regional organizations, regional experts, as well as the national focal points for Climate Change Adaptation. UNISDR will also finance the publication of the best practices and experiences that will be presented during the event, in a multi-media format.

### PROGRAM COMMITTEE:

A Program Committee is established for the preparation of the Program for the Encounter.

Other functions of the Program Committee are to define the criteria for the selection of the case studies included in the thematic panels, and the compilation of all presentations in a document that will be distributed prior to the Encounter. To this end, a call for case studies, lessons learned, and best practices will be made through leading government institutions on issues of Disaster Risk Management and Adaptation to Climate Change from each country, and through the UN and Inter-American Systems agencies, international cooperation organizations, NGOs, development banks, as well as other relevant actors that will participate in the Encounter.

The Program Committee will be responsible for the selection of the case studies included in the thematic panels and the preparation of a document that will integrate all pre-selected case studies.

With geographic a balance in mind, the Program Committee is formed as follows:

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A smaller committee will also be formed and will include the DGRPAD, GS/OAS, and UN/ISDR for the Americas. This Committee will prepare all of the documentation and pertinent communication material, and will be responsible of the day-to-day follow-up and event organization.

#### FORMAT OF THE EVENT:

The format of the event will consist of consecutive thematic panels – this is to ensure a cross-cutting approach with the participation of representatives of the most relevant sectors.

Each thematic session will include three (3) panelists, one (1) moderator, and one (1) rapporteur. The moderator will offer a brief introduction using a one to two-page discussion paper, as a way to define the issue and provide an overview of the observed progress, challenges and opportunities. The panelists will have up to 15 minutes to respond by highlighting both, the strengths and weaknesses of the case studies being presented, as well as the challenges and opportunities ahead. The moderator will then open the discussion with the audience, by providing observations and comments that will draw linkages and extract concrete conclusions and recommendations from the panel presentations.

A poster session will also be open throughout the Encounter. This will provide for an opportunity to share all case studies, including those presented during the panel sessions and those which were pre-selected but not included in these panels.

A meeting with cooperation agencies will also be convened to discuss a proposal for the establishment of a permanent mechanism that will enable these studies and findings to reach those in need. This will also help to strengthen cooperation between the countries in the region and regional and international organizations and agencies for bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the area of DRM and CCA.

The Encounter will run for two and a half days, with each day beginning with presentations on successful experiences through thematic panels. The Encounter will conclude with a plenary session in the morning of the last day.

The thematic sessions will be developed around five (5) pre-selected themes, which will address the five (5) priority actions of the HFA in terms of DRM and CCA coordination as described below:

1. Finance (Risk Transfer, Resource Management, Public and Private Investment, Financing Risk) (HFA priorities 1 and 4);
2. DRM Mainstreaming (Sector Agendas, Planning at different Levels of Government, Decentralization, Participation of Civil Society) (HFA priority 1);
3. DRM and CCA (Watershed Management, Environmental Management, Management of Climate Change Scenarios) (HFA priorities 2 and 4);
4. Land-use Planning (Codes and Standards, CQA, Geographic Information Systems, Re-settlement Programs, Urban and Rural Human Settlements) (HFA priority 4); and
5. Preparedness, Early Warning Systems (EWS) and Education (EWS, Emergency Preparedness, Protocols for Mutual Aid, Public Education and Awareness) (HFA priorities 2, 3, and 5).

Through each of these thematic areas, national and sub-regional experiences will be drawn out in a way that will be linked practically to the creation, development, and sustainability of national and local DRM and CCA Systems.