

9 October 2002

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan,
President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly,
on International Day for Disaster Reduction**

This day has been set aside by the United Nations for the world to reflect on how we are doing to protect people and the environment from the impact of disasters. Unfortunately there is no reason to assume that the frequency of disasters is going to decrease in the future. Rather the opposite is true. Natural hazards will always be a challenge to human communities, who have to decide about the best possible use of their limited resources through selecting appropriate strategies to avoid or mitigate the consequences of disasters, whether economical or humanitarian. Furthermore, the trans-boundary character of many disasters is forcing the international community to cooperate together very closely.

During the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction of the United Nations in the 90's, we have learned that the most desirable response to disasters and consequent damage is to follow the precautionary approach of disaster prevention as we can clearly see now in the work of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. We are more and more involved in the process of formulating pragmatic solutions with the aim to protect the large communities living in areas and regions of the world that are vulnerable to natural disasters.

The World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg has underlined, once again, that scientific research and its application, play a key role in providing us with crucial information about the earth's environment. Furthermore, this information is an important tool to foster disaster prevention and preparedness. Therefore, it is necessary to continue to support and strengthen international joint observation whether through surface-based monitoring or through increased use of satellite data; as well as to improve methodologies and techniques for assessing the dynamics of earth's ecosystems, especially in regard to climate change. Availability of such information is the key element for early warning systems to enables us to save lives.

The need to formulate and implement national disaster reduction strategies and policies provides a practical test of good governance. The way, in which any public administration is able to manage the prevention or mitigation of disaster, can significantly increase or decrease the degree of vulnerability of different communities and of human settlements. Weak or inadequate environmental and safety standards can have a very negative influence on the outcome of disasters.

The international community also has a big responsibility in the process of disaster reduction through assisting the developing countries in capacity building and other related aspects. Even more important is the urgent need for collaboration amongst Member States of the United

Nations to address the issue of major environmental threats like global climate change. However there are also positive signs. As I have personally seen during the floods in my country, there are several very visible examples of cooperation in the field of post-disaster help and mitigation throughout the international community. This gives me hope concerning the future coordinated global efforts to decrease human, environmental, economic and social losses from disasters.