

9 February 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Joseph Deiss,
President of the 65th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Informal Thematic Debate of the General Assembly on Disaster
Risk Reduction**

Mr. Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the first Informal Thematic Debate of the 65th session of the General Assembly. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who have traveled long distances to join us today.

Disaster risk reduction is crucial for protecting progress made towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and for achieving sustainable development.

Throughout the world, we are witnessing an increased frequency and intensity of natural hazards that wreck havoc on people's lives and livelihoods. There are earthquakes, like in Haiti; there are heavy rains and floods, like in Pakistan, in Brazil and in Australia, to give just a few recent examples. Particularly in developing countries, where infrastructure is poor and coping capacities are low, these hazards can often turn into large-scale, deadly disasters. By wiping out major development gains, such as school buildings, hospitals and energy grids, disasters perpetuate a cycle of underdevelopment, poverty and disempowerment.

At the General Assembly's High-level Plenary Meeting on the MDGs last September, world leaders acknowledged that disaster risk reduction and increasing resilience to all types of natural hazards can "have multiplier effects and accelerate achievement of the MDGs". They also recognized that for some small island developing States natural disasters pose a significant obstacle to sustainable development.

Reducing vulnerabilities to natural hazards is therefore a high priority for the international community as a whole. It also requires committed efforts by all stakeholders, from local governments and international financial institutions to civil society and the private sector.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In 2005, Member States made a significant step forward by adopting the ten-year Hyogo Framework for Action on Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters. The Hyogo Framework provides a clear guidance on strengthening resilience and disaster preparedness by reducing

the underlying risk factors. It also promotes the integration of disaster risk reduction in poverty eradication and development policies, plans and programs.

While much progress has been made in the implementation of this important Framework at the national, regional and global levels, its benefits are yet to be felt locally. Reaching the most vulnerable and poor communities with adequate investment and institutional support remains a big challenge, partly due to the lingering effects of the global economic and financial crisis.

It is encouraging that some countries, including Chile, Cuba, Japan and others, have taken a risk-sensitive approach to development and demonstrated that natural hazards do not necessarily result in disasters. Bangladesh, one of the poorest countries of the world, has also been able to reduce the impact of cyclones through improved community preparedness, early warning systems and stronger national coordination and planning mechanisms.

Rapid urbanization, coupled with ecosystem degradation and weak infrastructure, further heightens the vulnerability of communities to natural hazards such as earthquakes and hurricanes. Due to their concentration of population and economic assets, cities need to make extra efforts to mitigate disaster risk. In this context, I welcome the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction's five-year campaign to Make Cities Resilient.

Today's Thematic Debate aims to contribute to the ongoing efforts to mobilize further action on and political awareness of disaster risk reduction. In the first session on "Investing Today for a Safer Tomorrow", we will discuss the importance of making strategic investment in reducing vulnerabilities and enhancing coping capabilities. In the second session, mayors from the cities of Banda Aceh, of Istanbul and of Santa Tecla will share their experiences and views on building urban resilience through strategic policy interventions and partnerships.

I hope that today's discussion, which will feed into, among others, the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development, will provide greater momentum towards disaster risk reduction by all stakeholders at all levels. This is key to ensuring progress towards the achievement of the MDGs, poverty eradication and sustainable development.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish you fruitful exchanges.