



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

**Speech by
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Session 2: Areas of Co-operation:
Global efforts and regional complementarity to enhance disaster risk reduction

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Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will address in my presentation the issue of disaster risk reduction, which has become increasingly relevant to the work of the OSCE and its Partners for Co-operation in addressing security issues.

Recent tragic events such as the earthquake in Nepal or floods in the Western Balkans are sombre but powerful reminders of how disasters can affect our regions, with serious implications for security and stability. A growing number of experts' reports show that extreme weather and climate events have been increasing in recent decades and that this trend is likely to continue in the future. We have to prepare for more storms, floods and droughts. These disasters can cause deaths and ruin livelihoods, displace people, destroy crops, halt industrial production, and interrupt transport. They affect all elements of a safe, stable and functioning society, which in turn affects the security of States and peoples. In particular, climate change is already widely acknowledged as a "threat-multiplier" for instability and conflict. Its effects might not be immediately visible but they carry the risk of creating or further escalating local and regional tensions.

Notably, within the international security community, extreme weather events, natural catastrophes and tensions over diminishing natural resources are increasingly considered as a threat second only to interstate conflict.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This clearly illustrates that we need to strengthen and increase our communities' resilience to disasters, incorporating a security perspective into strategies for disaster risk reduction developed by OSCE participating States and its Partners for Co-operation.

In this context, I would like to briefly discuss the main linkages between security and disasters in order to provide some food for thought for this panel's discussions.

First, as already noted, disasters have the potential to lead to increased tensions and to aggravate existing conflicts, with potential spill-over effects across regions, for instance through migration and displacement of persons.

Second, ongoing conflicts can be disaster risk escalators, as they decrease the capacity of relevant authorities to manage such risks, which in turn affect people's vulnerability and political stability.

Third, disasters can affect security and stability across borders. This calls for increased bilateral and regional co-operation in disaster preparedness and prevention as well as in response and recovery efforts.

This leads to my final point. Disaster risk reduction provides an important opportunity to foster co-operation and confidence-building both within societies and across borders. It can serve as a tool for joint action, confidence building and ultimately, conflict prevention.

Excellencies,

As disasters pose a growing challenge to regional and international security, the OSCE has been striving to strengthen its capacities to address this threat through its comprehensive security concept, which integrates politico-military aspects and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms together with economic and environmental issues.

Under last year's Swiss Chairmanship, we reinforced the OSCE's commitments in this field. With the adoption of the 2014 Ministerial Council Decision on Disaster Risk Reduction, participating States acknowledged the linkages between disasters and security and emphasized that co-operation on disaster risk reduction can contribute to confidence building and good neighbourly relations. The Decision encouraged participating States to adopt an integrated approach to disaster risk reduction covering prevention, preparedness, response and recovery, and called for synergies between disaster risk reduction measures and climate change adaptation plans.

The Decision also granted to the OSCE executive structures, in particular to the Office of the Co-ordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities and to the Field Operations a reinforced mandate to support participating States in strengthening disaster risk reduction and management at all levels – local, national and regional. Importantly, the Decision also encouraged the OSCE Partners for Co-operation to voluntarily implement its provisions.

In a context of increased global demand for capacities in and awareness of disaster risk reduction and resilience, it is crucial to ensure synergies between efforts made at the OSCE level and broader international initiatives. The OSCE took part in the consultations and contributed inputs to the process that led to the adoption of the 2015-2030 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction last March. In this respect, the implementation of the OSCE Ministerial Decision by participating States and their Partners for Co-operation will significantly contribute to the implementation of this fundamental document.

The OSCE also strives to maintain frequent communication and exchanges with other relevant international actors. We were honoured to have Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, as a keynote speaker at the Concluding Meeting of the OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum last September.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Under this year's Serbian Chairmanship of the OSCE, disaster risk reduction continues to be a priority, with a particular focus on water governance as a means for strengthening trans-border security and stability.

The OSCE continues to address the security challenges associated with disasters and climate change through a number of projects and activities, ranging from strengthening national and regional capacities on wildfire management in the South Caucasus, Mongolia and Central Asia, to ecosystem restoration to mitigate floods in transborder river basins in Eastern Europe. We are also working with relevant partners to identify hot spots for climate change and security across OSCE sub-regions, and to strengthen community-based disaster risk reduction through public environmental information activities supported by 57 Aarhus Centers in 14 participating States established with OSCE assistance over the last decade.

Let me also underline that the OSCE does not carry out this work alone. Effective disaster risk reduction and management requires a transnational and cross-dimensional approach, so we carry out most of our activities in co-operation and close co-ordination with a number of international partners. The Environment and Security (ENVSEC) Initiative, under whose framework the OSCE has joined forces with UNEP, UNDP, UNECE, REC and NATO since its launching in 2003, is perhaps the most prominent example of such co-operation.

We should use today's discussions to explore opportunities for enhancing co-operation not only among international organizations but also across our respective regions. Existing platforms where OSCE participating States and Asian Partners for Co-operation are already working together provide the best option for this. Allow me to mention a few examples:

- The Asian Disaster Reduction Center could be a good platform as it includes among its members many OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation.
- The Sixth Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) to be held in September 2015 will offer a forum to discuss joint efforts in disaster preparedness.
- A new and promising initiative is the Northeast Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative, which we will learn more about at the side event later today.
- Finally, ASEAN in particular could offer valuable expertise in disaster risk management, for example through its Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance and the ASEAN disaster emergency stockpile.

We should facilitate and strengthen exchanges and co-operation between the OSCE and all these platforms through regular contacts at the working level, for instance through the participation of their representatives in OSCE meetings and conferences. I am planning an OSCE Security Days event on climate change and security for later this year and it could be a good opportunity to initiate such an exchange.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Looking ahead, 2015 will see a number of global processes that are closely interlinked with disaster risk reduction. Two particularly important upcoming events are the UN Summit on the Post-2015 Development Agenda in September and the 21st Conference of the Parties under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in December.

These processes offer a unique opportunity to enhance global and regional coherence and complementarity of international efforts in disaster risk reduction. The OSCE as a regional arrangement under Chapter VIII of the UN Charter is ready to contribute in this context to reduce risks to international security and stability posed by disasters.

Thank you, and I look forward to our discussion on this important topic.