

OPENING STATEMENT

By SRSG Robert Glasser

Opening Ceremony of the

6TH SESSION OF AFRICA

REGIONAL PLATFORM

- IMPLEMENTING SENDAI FRAMEWORK
IN AFRICA ●
-

| 22 November 2016 |

InterContinental Mauritius

Hon. Alain Wong Yen Cheong
Minister, Ministry of Environment,
Sustainable Development, Disaster
and Beach Management, Mauritius;

Ms. Olushola Olaide, representing
H.E. Mrs Tumusiime Rhoda Peace,
Commissioner for Rural Economy
and Agriculture, African Union
Commission;

Mr Jorge Cardoso,
Director and
Representative of the Host Regional
Economic Community – Southern
African Development Community;

Representatives of the Host
Government and Other Member
States, Intergovernmental
Organisations, the United Nations,
and Stakeholder Groups,

Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen

There are few parts of the world where disaster risk is such a strong feature of daily life as here on the great continent of Africa.

For all its riches and the talents of its people, Africa struggles on a grand scale with key drivers of hunger and displacement including climate change, rural urban migration, poverty, eco-system decline and a high incidence of drought and floods.

As you meet here this week to decide on concrete steps to reduce disaster risk and minimise disaster losses, some 70 million people

across the continent are struggling to cope and to feed their families.

This is the first great mass humanitarian emergency on the planet driven by climate change. And it is not getting the attention it deserves.

The worst drought to hit Ethiopia in thirty years has coincided with a strong El Niño and three of the hottest years on record, leaving nearly ten million people struggling to find food and water.

Some twenty million other people are in similar dire straits across the

Horn of Africa. And 30 million are in need in ten countries across southern Africa.

Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia, Swaziland and Zimbabwe have declared states of emergency, and two other Southern African Development Community members, Mozambique and South Africa have declared partial drought emergencies.

Climate change is undoubtedly contributing to water scarcity and impacting on food production. It is also intensifying the threat from the

three leading killers of children: diarrhoea, malnutrition and malaria.

Many drought-affected people live on the margins of resilience. On those margins, disaster risk can easily overwhelm them when it is accelerated by an extreme weather event.

Drought affects Africa more than any other continent; 136 major drought events have been recorded in Africa over the last twenty years.

In a study published last week at COP22, the World Bank estimates that extreme weather pushes 26

million people into poverty every year. This underlines the fact that the work of disaster risk reduction is vital to the overall success of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda including the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Action at the local level will be key and the first deadline of the Sendai Framework is 2020 by which time we need to see a substantial increase in national and local plans for disaster risk reduction.

There is a clear opportunity now to ensure complementarity between these plans and action on climate change adaptation. It is a sad irony that countries in Africa which contribute little to climate change, are more challenged by its consequences than the world's main polluting nations.

It is my hope that following COP22 we will start to see significant progress on setting up the Green Climate Fund and dramatic increases in investment in adaptation programmes, and technology transfer to help countries cope with

climate volatility including the risks presented by increased exposure to drought, heatwaves, rising seas, unpredictable rainfall patterns, and changes in the spread of vector-borne disease.

UNISDR along with WMO and the World Bank, is supporting the roll out of the Climate Risk Early Warning Systems also known as the CREWS initiative, which will initially benefit Burkina Faso, Mali and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. CREWS is designed to strengthen weather observation networks across Africa and in small island developing

states or SIDS which lack effective early warning systems.

Africa and the African Union in particular have played a critical role in shaping the Sendai Framework and one area where this is plain to see is in the greatly increased emphasis on health and resilient health infrastructure throughout the document by comparison with its predecessor, the Hyogo Framework for Action.

The last Regional Platform in Lagos, Nigeria, two years ago, declared: "Health is an imperative for disaster

risk reduction and community resilience. Health status and targets should be among indicators for monitoring and reporting on disaster risk reduction achievements.”

The Ebola pandemic was at its height when the Sendai Framework consultations were taking place and the impact of that experience is clear throughout the document.

Last month on International Day for Disaster Reduction, Nigeria’s Federal Ministry of Health, was recognized as a Sendai Target Champion for Reducing Mortality because of its

success in containing the spread of the Ebola virus.

We need to see closer alignment between disaster risk management and public health services.

Protecting health and other essential infrastructure is especially important in the context of rapid urbanisation. It was brought home to me last month at Habitat III that no part of the planet is urbanizing faster than sub-Saharan Africa.

Africa's population is set to double by 2050 from 1.1 billion today. More than 80% of that growth will

occur in cities, especially in informal settlements or slums.

That huge growth is an opportunity to get urban risk management right and to avoid the creation of new risk.

The good news is that African cities are not standing still. Many like Port Louis here in Mauritius, have joined UNISDR's Making Cities Resilient Campaign and are investing in improved risk assessment, urban upgrading, smarter land use and plans to strengthen environmental protection.

I am sure that urban resilience will be part of the focus in the outcomes we can expect from this meeting.

We are meeting this week in Mauritius, a small island developing state with a risk profile typical of many others around the world. It is exposed to tidal surges, cyclones and tsunamis. Increasing numbers of storms due partly to climate change will increase the economic challenges faced by many SIDS particularly those that are heavily dependent on tourism.

There are signs that in transparently managing disaster risks in the tourism sector, both businesses making investments, and SIDS striving to attract those investments, increase their competitiveness.

Overall, it is vitally important that the private sector is making risk informed investment decisions if we are to substantially reduce disaster losses. Private sector participation here this week is a welcome sign that progress is being made in this area across the continent.

On behalf of the UN Secretary General and the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction I would like to close by expressing my deep appreciation to the Government of Mauritius for hosting this important event and to our co-organizers, the African Union.

The last such Platform played a pivotal role in shaping the Sendai Framework and I am sure that the key substantive outcome of this regional platform – a Programme of Action for Implementing the Sendai Framework in Africa – will help bring about a shift from managing

disasters to managing disaster risk, and deliver results in reducing disaster losses.

This is my first Africa Regional Platform and I am really looking forward to the discussion and the debate over the next few days as I become better acquainted with you all.

Thank you.