

STATEMENT BY THE COOK ISLANDS
THIRD UN WORLD CONFERENCE ON DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Your Excellencies

Heads of State and Governments

Hon. Ministers

Heads and Representatives of UN Agencies, International and Regional Organisations

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

Greetings and Kia Orana

To the Government and the people of Japan and especially Sendai, as our gracious host, I bring you a special Kia Orana from the people of the Cook Islands.

Mr President,

In 2005, the Cook Islands suffered the onslaught of five tropical cyclones in the space of one month. The devastation caused to both physical surroundings and emotional suffering of those affected prompted the beginning of a change in our approach to disaster risk reduction and management in the Cook Islands.

The timing for change in 2005 was opportune and the Cook Islands utilised the Hyogo Framework for Action and our own Pacific Regional Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction to provide guidance in determining the steps taken in disaster risk reduction for the years that followed.

Mr President,

I am pleased that the Cook Islands can boast that it has the institutional arrangements for coordination, response and recovery

formalised in legislation under the auspice of the Office of the Prime Minister. Since 2007, resilience has been a standalone national goal and in the current iteration of our National Sustainable Development Plan 2011-2015, disaster risk reduction has also been mainstreamed into six out of seven other goals. We established in 2011, the Disaster Response Trust Fund, where a certain percentage of any unspent operational Cook Islands Government funds at the end of the financial year is held in trust for immediate response in times of disaster. To compliment this, and strengthen our own position to respond, we also participate in the Pacific Catastrophe Insurance Programme with the World Bank. We recognise that we can never cover the costs of a major disaster on our own and would need external assistance. However, we are serious about disaster risk reduction and have 'put our money where our mouth is', so to speak.

In 2011, we re-examined our systems and changed to integrate disaster risk reduction and climate change which now have joint policy, planning and budgeting frameworks. In addition, our new National Infrastructure Investment Plan released just last week, used disaster risk reduction and climate change as prioritisation criteria for future investment in infrastructure.

Mr President,

Whilst we are proud of our achievements, we have also identified gaps and are working on plugging these. These include, changes to legislation to reflect our current and anticipated disaster risk reduction needs, strengthening coordination, having greater transparency and dissemination of information to our stakeholders and our communities, and most importantly, incorporating the human side of disasters far more adequately with particular attention on gender relations, the young and the aged, and persons with disabilities.

So much still needs to be done and outstanding strategies and actions are outlined in our Joint National Action Plan for Disaster Risk

Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation, our National Disaster and Climate Compatible Development Policy, and our sectoral and agency plans. What we aspire to in disaster risk reduction is also reflected in the 2014 SAMOA Pathway and our own Pacific Islands regional frameworks. We recognise that we cannot do this alone, and we need international cooperation. International cooperation will compliment our own national efforts.

Mr President,

We are being presented with a wonderful opportunity in 2015. The opportunity to really change the way we do business in disaster risk reduction, and to think and practice disaster risk reduction the way that it should be - as an integral part of sustainable development with linkages to all aspects of development, including climate change.

It is our hope that the post 2015 framework will be extremely clear. It should minimise fragmentation; enhance cohesion; streamline modalities of delivery of disaster risk reduction; simplify access to international finance; consolidate monitoring, evaluation and reporting to ensure that our peoples all over the world, and particularly those who are most vulnerable, can have the confidence that their resilience is guaranteed.

Mr President

I hope that we here at this Conference, can be able to guarantee resilience to the best of our ability, with the post 2015 Disaster Risk Reduction Framework.

I thank you Mr President.