



Strasbourg, 9 February 2005

AP/CAT (2005) 10
Or. Fr.

**UNITED NATIONS' WORLD CONFERENCE ON DISASTER
REDUCTION,
KOBE, JAPAN, 18-22 JANUARY 2005**

Plenary session, 21 January 2005

ADDRESS

**Apolonio RUIZ LIGERO,
Vice-Governor,
Council of Europe Development Bank, Paris**

Mr President,

I first wish to congratulate the organisers of this major conference, which assumes even greater importance in the wake of the horrific disasters of 26 December 2004 in South-East Asia.

I also wish to thank the Japanese authorities for their hospitality and to congratulate them on their excellent organisation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the face of natural disasters, international solidarity and coordination of efforts and action between governments, international organisations, multilateral financial institutions, NGOs and civil society are absolutely essential.

In this context the CEB (the Council of Europe Development Bank) proposes its financial co-operation and technical assistance.

It is the only international financial institution whose Articles of Agreement include financing of reconstruction, rehabilitation and aid projects for the victims of natural or ecological disasters among its priority fields of action. It also works in co-operation with other national and multilateral financial institutions in the field of natural disaster prevention.

In recent years the CEB has approved 47 projects in 13 countries in the natural disasters sector, representing a total of €3 billion, which corresponds to 20% of the projects approved by the Bank over the period.

These projects have included loans for rehabilitation, prevention and reconstruction schemes in Turkey in the regions hit by the earthquake of 1999 and projects concerning flood prevention schemes on the Oder and Tuzla rivers in Poland and Hungary and training of emergency teams in Romania.

The CEB has learned from its long experience in this field - spanning fifty years - that particular importance must be attached to a rapid response capacity and the preparedness of the relevant bodies to cope with natural disasters. This experience also shows the relevance of disaster reduction and hazard control measures.

This prompted the CEB to organise a workshop on prevention of natural disasters in April 2001, in which representatives of other IFIs and of the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement (a partial agreement of the Council of Europe which brings together 25 countries) participated.

The workshop's conclusions stressed the need to accompany the measures taken with in-depth studies of vulnerabilities, risks and their consequences.

Prior identification of risks and of the chief vulnerabilities is a key aspect of prevention.

Experience shows that disaster reduction measures are more viable and effective than damage repair or reconstruction and rehabilitation measures.

Based on empirical evidence it is recognised that for every dollar spent on or invested in prevention, eight dollars expenditure on reconstruction can be avoided.

Preventive measures cannot stop the occurrence of the natural phenomena that cause disasters, but the state of preparedness of the public, the authorities and all relevant welfare agencies is a key factor, above all during the most critical stages of any emergency situation immediately after a disaster hits.

The tragic events caused by the tsunamis which hit eleven countries of South-East Asia show the need for prevention, early-warning systems, preparedness of local populations and a rapid reaction capacity.

In this connection, joint coordination efforts are an absolute must with a view to assisting countries in the fields of civil defence, institutional capacity and vulnerability of the public.

With that aim in mind, complementarity between IFIs is vital to the implementation of long-term financing systems, which will have an extremely useful role to play in reinforcing international co-operation, the pooling of experience and the adoption of best practices.

Mr President, I wish to conclude by saying how important it is to include disaster prevention budgets under the head of official development aid rather than humanitarian assistance.

I can assure you that the CEB will in future continue its efforts to be an unavoidable key player among international financial institutions, offering funding on extremely favourable terms, for projects relating to disaster prevention and post-disaster rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Thank you for your attention