



Check Against Delivery

***Speech by the
Chair of the UN Disaster Risk Management task team and
UNDP Programme Specialist on Crisis Prevention and Recovery By
Mr. Jorg Schimmel
On behalf of the UN Resident Coordinator in Papua New Guinea.***

***International Day for Disaster Reduction
12th October 2011***

“Making Children and Youth Partners in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)”

Port Moresby, 12 October 2011

Mr. Ikosi, Acting Secretary of DPLGA
Mr. Mose, Acting Director, National Disaster Centre
Father Sylvester,
Distinguished guests,
Children and youth,
Students and teachers,
Ladies and gentlemen;
A very good morning to all of you.

1. On behalf of the United Nations Resident Coordinator, it is my pleasure to be here with you, on this day, to mark the International Day for Disaster Reduction.
2. The second Wednesday of October each year marks the United Nations ***International Day for Disaster Reduction (IDDR)***. The day forms part of the global awareness campaign to raise awareness of disaster risk reduction, spark

public interest and ultimately help prevent, reduce and minimise loss and damage from disasters.

3. As we observe the day here in Papua New Guinea and around the world, many countries, including countries in our region are grappling with disasters. Tuvalu is currently suffering from a severe drought, so severe that the Government has declared a state of emergency in the country. As you are probably aware, a ship carrying 1,700 metric tons of fuel oil and potentially dangerous chemicals ran aground on 05 October in the Bay of Plenty near Tauranga, 100 miles (160 kilometers) southeast of Auckland. It is leaking oil and it is believed that as much as 350 tons of oil may have leaked from the vessel threatening one of the New Zealand's most famous areas of natural bio-diversity.

4. Countries in Asia and South East Asia are grappling with floods that affected millions of people in India, China, Pakistan, Philippines and Thailand.

5. The recent events are a warning to us. Let's not forget that Papua New Guinea is highly vulnerable to the impacts of disasters and at any time the country might be hit by a disaster.

6. Located on the margins of the Australian and Pacific tectonic plates, Papua New Guinea is highly vulnerable to earthquakes, resulting in secondary effects such as tsunamis and landslides. Papua New Guinea has 44 active volcanoes. The coastal areas of southeast are vulnerable to the tropical cyclones. Some provinces experience high level of rain that result in flooding. At the same time high reliance of rainfall for agricultural activities leaves the population vulnerable to drought. Shortage of rainfall can rapidly develop into drought and threaten widespread crop failure.

7. Worldwide there has been a growing concern that the intensity and frequency of hydro-meteorological disasters such as cyclones, floods and droughts will increase with climate change. Papua New Guinea is already feeling the effects of climate change. Of growing concern is the threat of sea-level rise

to small, low-lying islands and atolls. Storm wave also threatens the islands' and atolls' subsistence gardens and farms.

8. As we all know disasters not only destroy hard earned developmental gains but also divert already scarce resources from developmental programs to relief and rehabilitation slowing down the progress of a Nation. Hence in order to ensure that a Nation stays on the development path, it is crucial to take steps to reduce the risks of disasters.

9. Unplanned development amplifies the vulnerability of people. Poorly regulated natural resource extraction, environmental degradation, deforestation, pollution of land and water resources coupled with lack of preparedness to manage a crisis situation- contribute to the making of a disaster.

10. However, **disasters are not natural**. Instead, risks can be reduced substantially by adequate preparedness planning and by taking pro-active action to identify and mitigate risks including hazard and vulnerability mapping, raising awareness of authorities and population about various hazards, land use planning, investing in disaster resilient constructions and infrastructures etc. Only by investing in tangible risk reduction measures can we reduce vulnerability and protect development.

11. The theme for this year's IDDR is ***Making Children & Youth Partners in Disaster Risk Reduction***. The slogan "Step Up for Disaster Risk Reduction!" is a basic call for action to all children/youth to step up to the challenge and lead others to get involved and participate in the efforts for DRR.

12. Studies have indicated that children and youth represent more than half of the population affected by Disasters. Worldwide some 66 million children are affected by disasters every year. This confirms that they are one of the most vulnerable groups to disaster. Effective risk management must involve those most at risk but often their involvement in risk reduction is overlooked. Hence it is crucial that there should be systematic efforts to involve children and youth in disaster risk reduction activities. This will not only reduce their vulnerability to

disasters but also ensure that they play an active role in disaster mitigation and preparedness.

13. Although children and youth are often portrayed as victims of disaster and climate change it is about time that Children and youth should be encouraged to participate as active agents of change in disaster risk reduction and decision making. The children and the youth are the future of humanity and are tomorrow's decision makers hence it is essential to include them in Disaster Risk Reduction. If they are properly educated and informed about risk reduction we can be assured of the fact that we will have a better future.

14. It is time to step up to the challenge and involve the Children and Youth in the efforts for Disaster Risk Reduction by educating and informing children and youth that disaster risk reduction is also their concern and by enhancing partnerships among governments, children and youth-led organizations, local governments, academia, civil society organizations, the private sector, the media and the UN system, to enhance commitment and support for children and youth inputs to DRR.

15. On this occasion, I urge all esteemed guests and partners present here in this room— Government Departments, civil societies, international institutions and the private sector -- to step up our efforts to reduce disaster risks. Let me remind you all that disaster risk reduction is everybody's business. On this International Day, let us renew our dedication to this very important task.

Thank you very much.