

IFI Secretariat summary:
United Nations Special Thematic Session on Water & Disasters
and Side-Event to the Special Session

ICHARM, as a member of High Panel Expert on Water and Disasters (HLEP/UNSGAB) supported a special high-level session on water and disasters, convened by the UN Secretary-General H.E. Mr. Ban Ki Moon on 6 March 2013. This event marked the first high-level UN thematic event discussing issues at the nexus of water and disasters. His Imperial Highness the Crown Prince of Japan and His Royal Highness the Crown Prince of Orange of the Netherlands presented keynote addresses to the assembled audience of 500 experts and officials from UN member states, international organizations, private sector and civil society.

Overall messages from the Special Session reflected the consensus that water-related disasters, increasing in frequency and severity as the climate and human demographics shift, are a significant barrier to sustainable development and that linkages between water disasters and poverty are undeniable. Speakers and panelists agreed that integrated and holistic approaches to policy-making are necessary to address water and disasters, and that the international community can do much to guide concrete actions for reducing disaster risk. Many discussed upcoming opportunities to integrate water disaster risk reduction into the post-2015 development agenda, as negotiations are underway to craft policies and goals to succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change, and the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), all ending in 2015. In particular, inclusion of water and disasters in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a central pillar of the post-2015 agenda, will frame much of the UN's work for decades to come.

Presenters emphasized the importance of disaster preparedness, highlighting a growing awareness that, in addition to saving human lives, disaster preparedness is often cost-effective. For instance, as related by Mr. Kittiratt Na-Ranong, Deputy Prime Minister of Thailand, after severe flooding in 1999, Thai officials had opportunity to invest in flood protection projects which would have cost only a fraction of the estimated \$10 billion USD in losses incurred in the 2011 Chao Phraya flood. Many speakers mentioned that early warning systems are one of the most cost-effective disaster risk reduction measures. Indeed, the emphasis to effective combination of structural and nonstructural disaster mitigation measures, including early warning, preparedness, disaster response and evacuation, was a key theme of the day.

ICHARM additionally co-hosted a Side Event to the Special Thematic Session on Water & Disasters

on 5 March 2013, bringing together approximately 100 experts from 30 countries and organizations. The objective of the Side Event was to deepen discussions related to water and disasters and to facilitate common understanding and shared vision on key topics leading up to the UN Special Session.

The following three plenary sessions comprised the Side Event:

- From relief to preparedness – enhancing leadership, governance and coordination system for effective mitigation of mega-water-disasters;
- Addressing Water and Disasters in the context of Post-MDG and Post-Hyogo Process; and
- Addressing extreme hydrological events by Integrated Water Resources Management.

Side Event participants recommended that the international community take the following actions to address water and disasters at the global level:

- Establish tangible and measurable internationally-agreed targets for disaster risk reduction as part of the post-MDG process.
- Enhance international and regional cooperation to facilitate sharing of knowledge and experience in disaster management, and to provide coordination mechanisms for disaster risk monitoring and relief operations. The UN and other international and regional organizations have vital roles to play in this action.
- Continue effort to implement the Action Plan proposed by the High-Level Expert Panel on Water and Disasters. Establish a regular dialogue on water and disasters at the UN.

(Official version to come)