



Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction and Water

Summary of The Second UN Special Thematic Session on Water and Disasters

The Second UN Special Thematic Session on Water and Disasters was held on November 18th, 2015 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

The meeting was realized by the initiative of the United Nations Secretary-General Mr. BAN Ki-moon and Dr. Han Seung-soo, the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction and Water and the Chair of the High-level Experts and Leaders Panel on Water and Disasters. The session brought together about 500 representatives, experts and staff members of the member missions, observers, UN secretariat and agencies, and invited experts from public and private sectors and civil societies.



Recognizing that addressing the issue of “water and disasters” is critical element and the core of achieving sustainable development, the participants of the Special Thematic Session shared the following recognitions and understanding.

- Issues of water and disaster resilience are now among the most pressing issues in our 21st century world. Water-related disasters, such as floods and droughts, account for 95% of all disasters in terms of number of affected people.
- Water-related disasters affect developed and developing countries alike, but have a much greater impact on the poor and vulnerable, especially women, children, the elderly, and those recovering from the impact of conflicts. The issue of water and disasters cannot be addressed by any one government alone but requires international solidarity.

- The risks of water-related disasters are increasing by a variety of factors, including climate change, rapid urbanization, unsustainable land use, ecosystem degradation as well as poverty. Water-related disasters put at risk the gains in human and social development so far achieved, and could hamper the efforts in implementing and carrying out the future development work towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) defined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Issues of water and disaster resilience are intimately related, and are core global challenges that must be addressed comprehensively within the context of sustainable development. Achieving the water goal (SDG6) and the disaster risk reduction targets in the SDGs would not only save lives, but also lay the foundations for achieving food security, increase access to energy, and help address the challenges of rapid urbanization and climate change.
- The overarching aim of the 2030 Agenda to eradicate global poverty can only be achieved if it is supported by policies and regulations that directly target and minimize -to the extent possible- water-related disaster risks, in line with the globally agreed frameworks, including the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.
- The global experience of managing disasters and reducing climate and disaster risks have produced a wealth of knowledge and best practices, and have proven that disaster risk reduction can be achieved. A society more resilient to disasters can be created by making use of available means and learning lessons from history.

In order to reduce global water-related disaster risks and achieve sustainable development, the participants of the Special Thematic Session made the following proposals and recommendations.

1. Urgent actions to be taken at the UN level

- Focused discussion on the issue of “water and disasters” like this Special Thematic Session should continue in the future in order to promote raising awareness, to facilitate sharing of good practices, and to give member states the opportunity to improve their policies, governance and activities on disaster risk reduction. The United Nations should establish a regular dialogue process on water and disasters so that the issue is addressed in a continuous and progressive manner towards the achievement of internationally agreed targets.
- Implementing the Sendai Framework and the 2030 Agenda requires solid and workable structure at the UN level, including independent working groups focused on implementation. The work in the area of water and disasters should be integral part of this architecture, and should make use of existing groups and resources including the High-level Experts and Leaders Panel on Water and Disasters.

2. “Water and disasters” closely linked to sustainable development

- The issues of water and disaster risk reduction need to be placed on the agenda at all levels, including local, national, regional and global levels. We must stop thinking in silos and responding in fragmented ways by addressing these issues, comprehensively within the context of sustainable development.
- Political commitments on the issues of water and disaster risk reduction made in Sendai Framework and 2030 Agenda must be matched by finance. Investment in water infrastructure and disaster risk reduction, both structural and non-structural, not only prevents frequently occurring disasters but also mitigates the catastrophic impacts of mega-disasters. It can save lives, avoid the destruction of vital infrastructure, and make a significant difference in achieving the national and international goals of ending poverty and ensuring sustainable and equitable growth for all.
- Governments must strengthen water-related disaster risk governance by exercising leadership and continually improving disaster risk management. Governments must implement concrete actions and integrate water-related disaster risk reduction within development and poverty reduction policies and long-term planning in a comprehensive, flexible and adaptive manner.
- International cooperation and assistance needs to go far beyond emergency response. More assistance should be directed to enhance risk preparedness, prevention and mitigation, particularly of those countries and societies that are most in need.

3. Science and technology at the center of disaster risk reduction strategy

- Development, transfer and application into practices of science and technology should be in the center of on disaster risk reduction strategy at global, country and community levels. Science and technology community should advance inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary research and help improve and integrate data collection and dissemination, and work together with the implementation community to develop tools to enhance governance and decision making for disaster risk reduction. Governments should make proactive use of science and technology on water and disasters to enhance their levels of preparedness and response.

4. All-stakeholders participation

- International society and governments must reach out to all stakeholders to raise their awareness and understanding of disaster risk in all its dimensions, and to ensure all stakeholders recognize the importance of water-related disaster risk reduction in their agenda, and mainstream the tools and approaches provided through global initiatives.
- Strong coordination and structured partnerships among all stakeholders - including governments, international development partners, the private sector and civil society - need to be promoted to develop comprehensive and cohesive policies and actions for tackling disaster risk. Such partnerships should be built on the collective successes while avoiding duplication of effort.
- Involvement of stakeholders should be sustainable, integrated, comprehensive, preventive, economic, social and technological. A mechanism for horizontal and vertical coordination is needed. An *all-of-society engagement and partnership* - which is propagated by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sendai framework alike – is about inclusive, accessible and non-discriminatory participation. This can only be achieved if investment in empowerment of those groups in society is made.

5. International and Regional Cooperation

- International cooperation and assistance needs to go far beyond emergency response. More assistance should be directed to enhance risk preparedness, prevention and mitigation, particularly of those countries and societies that are most in need.
- Regional cooperation for responding to and for reducing risks of water-related disasters should be promoted to support local/national efforts, particularly in regions where countries face similar disaster-related challenges, or share hazard risks across borders. This can be done by mobilizing existing international/regional initiatives.