
The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction: Background and Objectives

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In December 1989, at its Forty-Fourth Session, the General Assembly of the United Nations proclaimed the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), starting 1 January 1990. The objective of the Decade is to reduce, through concerted international action, especially in developing countries, the loss of life, property damage, and social and economic disruption caused by natural disasters, such as earthquakes, wildfires, grasshopper and locust infestations, drought and desertification and other calamities of natural origin.

The goals of the Decade are:

- to improve the capacity of each country to mitigate the effects of natural disasters expeditiously and effectively, paying special attention to assisting developing countries in the assessment of disaster damage potential and in the establishment of early warning systems and disaster-resistant structures when and where needed;
- to devise appropriate guidelines and strategies for applying existing scientific and technical knowledge, taking into account the cultural and economic diversity among nations;
- to foster scientific and engineering endeavours aimed at closing critical

gaps in knowledge in order to reduce loss of life and property;

- to disseminate existing and new technical information related to measures for the assessment, prediction and mitigation of natural disasters;
- to develop measures for the assessment, prediction, prevention and mitigation of natural disasters through programmes of technical assistance and technology transfer, demonstration projects, and education and training, tailored to specific disasters and locations, and to evaluate the effectiveness of those programmes.

THE ORIGINS OF THE DECADE

Each year, natural hazards take a heavy toll of humankind, in terms of deaths, suffering, and economic losses. Developing countries are particularly affected. Most of the deaths, casualties and damage occur in the poor countries of the world, jeopardizing development efforts. But recent breakthroughs in knowledge and advances in technology now make it possible to envisage a large mobilization of resources in order to reduce the tragedy of natural disasters.

An international decade on natural disasters was first proposed at the Eighth