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***UNITED NATIONS WORLD CONFERENCE ON  
DISASTER REDUCTION***

***Kobe, Japan, 18-22 January 2005***

**Statement by Mrs Gabriella BATTAINI-DRAGONI,  
Director General of Education, Culture and Heritage,  
Youth and Sport**

**KOBE, Japan**

**20 January 2005**

At the onset, allow me on behalf of the Council of Europe to convey our deep sorrow for the terrible human tragedy of the Tsunami disaster in South East Asia.

We also wish to thank the Government of Japan for hosting this Conference, for its contribution to the overall process and let me add our admiration for the work of reconstruction here in Kobe, 10 years after the earthquake.

“Disaster Reduction” came on the political agenda of the Council of Europe in 1987. It was then that the Organisation took the initiative to set up a UNIQUE structure for regional cooperation between the countries of the north and south of the Mediterranean area and eastern Europe: the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement.

To date, 25 States, the EU, UNESCO, WHO, ISDR, OCHA and UNITAR participate in the Agreement with a view to ensure better risk management of major natural or technological hazards through a dynamic institutional – policy making and scientific mechanism for a holistic disaster management strategy with special focus on prevention, mitigation and preparedness.

Since 1987, 10 Ministerial Conferences have taken place. During the 9<sup>th</sup> Ministerial meeting held in France in 2002, the ministers stressed the importance of the risk prevention policy set out in the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. They fully acknowledged the Strategy and its Plan of Action.

The Ministers, at their 10<sup>th</sup> meeting in 2003, stressed in particular that:

*“Disaster reduction is one central element of sustainable development and the associated integrated disaster risk management is a primary responsibility of governments. Such risk management should be based on a holistic approach to risk prevention and reduction combining scientific knowledge, vulnerability assessment and the competencies of disaster managers”.*

Significant Euro-Mediterranean Programmes have been implemented since 1987 through a network of 26 specialised centres in areas such as:

- Warning systems so as to enable member States concerned by earthquakes to be informed in quasi real time under the responsibility of the Euro-Mediterranean Seismological Centre (EMSC) in France.
- First assessment of potential number of victims and damage arising from a seismic event under the responsibility of the Moscow Centre on new technologies for the management of Natural and Technological Major Hazards.
- Education, training and information through the FORM-OSE programme. At university level, the launching of European Masters in various fields such as disaster medicine, risk science and seismic vulnerability of buildings deserve special mention.

The Agreement, through a synergy to be strengthened with the EU and the UN family agencies will do its best to facilitate implementation, at regional level, of the conclusions of the Kobe Conference.

To give practical impetus, it will:

- Examine how the Agreement's network of 26 Euro-Mediterranean Centres could share its scientific expertise and research with the UN so as to contribute to the success of the World Conference on "Early Warning" to be held in Bonn at the end of 2005 as proposed by Germany.
- Place emphasis, in the Agreement's future programmes on continued comparative analysis of national legislations and/or legislative advice on risk management and prevention and make its specific expertise available to ensure implementation and strengthening world-wide through appropriate legal instruments of the indispensable legal framework needed to set standards for disaster risk reduction and management.
- Contribute extensively, through strengthened cooperation with UNESCO to the UN Decade for Sustainable Development as a whole, and specifically to disaster reduction and human security enhancement in both school and out-of-school levels, namely through curricula, textbooks and training of trainers of teachers, including vocational training and awareness raising.

As to the unprecedented recent events in South East Asia, may I add that the Council of Europe stands ready to cooperate with the coordinating UN bodies as clearly indicated in the letters sent by the Secretary General of our Organisation to Mr. Egeland and Mr. Matsuura only a few days ago and make its scientific, legislative and educational expertise available in the present and future efforts of the international community to cope with the terrible losses and efforts for reconstruction needed in the South East region.

To enjoy rights, we need enabling environments in the socio-economic, cultural and natural fields as well as democratic and cohesive societies. The Council of Europe is aware of the extremely serious disruptive effect of disasters on the processes of real access to rights and particularly for the poor and vulnerable. This is why the Council of Europe - whose mission is to promote and protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law, will spare no efforts to offer its support.