74th Session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

15 May 2018
Venue: ESCAP Hall, United Nations Conference Centre

Statement by:

Ms. Mami Mizutori
Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction
• Distinguished Chairperson and representatives of UN Member States
• Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for this opportunity to speak at the 74th Session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

This meeting takes place just days after the 10th anniversaries of the Wenchuan earthquake and cyclone Nargis – two defining disasters which led to huge loss of life in China and Myanmar, and disrupted the lives of millions of people.

Those tragic events have catalyzed efforts across the region to better prepare for disasters, to strengthen the capacity of institutions, and to create robust policy and legislative frameworks.

But significant challenges remain before us. Asia and the Pacific is home to two thirds of the world’s poor. Although significant investments have been made to reduce poverty, these efforts are in danger of being undermined by increasing disaster risk.

This risk is particularly acute in the low and lower middle-income countries in Asia-Pacific that are already disproportionately impacted by disasters. Between 2000 and 2015, these countries lost almost 15 times more people due to disasters than the region’s high-income countries.

Away from large-scale disasters which make headlines, many communities in Asia-Pacific face a daily struggle with high-frequency, low-impact events. Poorer communities are unable to cope with the impact of recurrent low-level disasters and even a small shock can further push vulnerable communities and households into abject poverty.

Low levels of social and capital expenditures and risk-blind investments create inequalities that accentuate risk and vulnerability. Additionally, frequent disasters further deepen such social and economic inequalities by disproportionately affecting children, women and the disabled. This results in a vicious cycle of poverty, inequality and disaster risk.

This cycle needs to be broken. We need better data on disaster losses, and on social, economic and gender inequality. This data is especially needed at a local level to fully understand the effects of so-called “everyday disasters” if we are to achieve the sustainable development goals.
The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction is the global framework guiding our collective efforts. Introduced three years ago, it calls on countries to address underlying risks and vulnerabilities in order to achieve sustainable development.

Measuring disaster losses is critical for improving how we manage disaster risk. The launch of the Sendai Framework monitoring process in March this year is the first attempt to systematically record and report on disaster losses. By the end of March, 54 countries – around a quarter of them in Asia-Pacific – provided data on disaster losses for the first Sustainable Development Goal progress report. This report will be issued in July at the High Level Forum on Sustainable Development.

Reducing the impact of disasters on the poor and most vulnerable requires a whole of society, multi-sectoral approach. More work is required to integrate disaster risk reduction into key sectors where the poor live and work, such as agriculture. This region is also characterized by unparalleled investment in new infrastructure, offering tremendous opportunities for the public and private sectors to address disaster risk and build resilience for the benefit of future generations.

“Preventing Disaster Risk: Protecting Sustainable Development” is the theme of the upcoming 2018 Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, from 03 to 06 July, co-organized by the Government of Mongolia and UNISDR. I look forward to meeting many of you in Mongolia to continue our joint efforts to tackle disaster risk reduction and promote more equal and sustainable development in the Asia Pacific region.

Thank you for your attention.