THE DEPUTY SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS AT

3rd Multi-hazard Early Warning Conference, Closing Ceremony

24 May 2022
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to join you for the closing of this third Multi-hazard Early Warning Conference and to have heard how partners are following-up on the Secretary General’s call for action on early warning systems.

The impacts of the world’s current multi-dimensional crises, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the climate emergency, represent challenges to everyone. They demand innovative approaches, in terms of financial and governance systems, that can build disaster resilience. We must seize this opportunity.

This Conference comes shortly after the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, which highlighted that nearly half of humanity is already living in climate danger zones and many ecosystems are at tipping points from which they may not return. The IPCC report is an atlas of human suffering revealing how people and the planet are being devastated by climate disruption.

The staggering rise in disasters over the last 20 years has affected more than 4 billion people, resulting in over 1.2
million lives lost and US$ 2.97 trillion in economic losses. Floods, droughts and storms top the list of recorded disaster events associated with the highest number of people affected. Floods, the most common type of disaster, alone affected 1.6 billion people worldwide in the last two decades, the highest figure for any disaster type.

While climate change mitigation is crucial, so is overall resilience building and adaptation. We are facing an era where the number of disasters is projected to reach 560 a year – or 1.5 disasters a day – by 2030. Mitigation and adaptation must be pursued with equal force and urgency to avoid the spiral of destruction.

We need to do more, especially for the most vulnerable, to incorporate disaster risk in how we live, build, and invest. Communities need to be equipped to adapt and build resilience against multiple risks and climate change impacts, as outlined by the UN Secretary-General’s report: ‘Our Common Agenda.’ We need to ensure that information is available to anticipate storms, heatwaves, floods and droughts. But risks related to other hazards -- biological, environmental, geological, and technological -- also need our attention. The ultimate goal is a multi-hazard approach to early warning.
A people-centred early warning system, combined with early action will save lives and empower individuals and communities to act in a timely and appropriate manner. This approach reduces the likelihood of loss of lives, personal injury and illness, and damage to property, assets and the environment. Early warnings need to take into account the needs of everyone, especially the most vulnerable. And they must be disseminated in an accessible way to ensure that they support communities when needed.

Despite important achievements in scaling up early warning systems globally, significant gaps remain. One-third of the world’s people, mainly in least developed countries and small island developing states, are still not covered by early warning systems. In Africa, the numbers are even starker: 60 per cent of people lack coverage. This is simply unacceptable. We must boost the power of prediction for everyone and build their capacity to act.

Against this backdrop, the Secretary-General made an important announcement on World Meteorological Day this year. The United Nations is spearheading efforts to ensure that every person on Earth is protected by early warning
systems within five years. In this regard, an action plan will be presented at the UNFCCC COP27 later this year in Egypt.

Discussions over the last two days at this conference have kickstarted important ideas about how to move forward. Through our joint efforts, we can slow the rate of preventable disasters and boost our capacity to withstand crises. However, these endeavours urgently need adequate funding. Financing and scaled up investments are key to ensuring access to early warning systems.

I urge multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral collaboration to implement key outcomes of the Third Multi-hazard Early Warning Conference for the benefit of all communities. Attaining global coverage of early warning systems within the next five years is a much-needed and achievable goal. But given the staggering rise in the number of disasters, we need to act urgently.

I would like to thank the organizers of the Third Multi-hazard Early Warning Conference and the Government of Indonesia for hosting this event. For those of you leaving today, I wish you a safe journey and for those staying for the GP2022, I wish you a fruitful and productive meeting.
Thank you.