New Zealand Statement: 7th Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (Bali 2022)

Theme: From Risk to Resilience: Towards Sustainable Development for All in a COVID-19 Transformed World

E aku rangatira, tēnā koutou katoa, ka nui te honore, ki te mihi, ki a koutou

[Translation: Honoured leaders, I acknowledge and greet you all]

Excellencies, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

We are emerging from a time like no other in recent memory. A time that has changed how we manage risks, how we respond to disasters, and how we consider resilience. We are interested to hear the lessons from each of you as we look to improve our resilience in the changed world as we emerge from this pandemic.

Like many countries, throughout the pandemic New Zealand has faced numerous concurrent emergencies, including tsunami, significant floods, wildfire, and drought.

Our experience with COVID 19 has given us further insight into how our most vulnerable populations are disproportionately impacted. We watched as Auckland, our largest city, faced COVID-19, flooding, and tornadoes simultaneously. We then watched the community band together to respond and to help the families most in need and those isolating.

New Zealanders are, and will continue to be, at risk from a broad range of hazards. We can do much to reduce our risks, through both a risk management approach, and by building broader societal resilience. We can also ensure we have effective processes in place for responding to and recovering from emergencies and other types of disruption when they do happen.

We are currently working to modernise the framework of legislation and guidance that underpins New Zealand’s emergency management system. This work is happening as a part of a wider programme of work that will deliver extensive change to New Zealand’s emergency response system.
Hazard events and some emergencies do not discriminate, but they do disproportionately impact some populations. In New Zealand, these populations include Māori, Pacific peoples, rural communities, the culturally and linguistically diverse, seniors, women and children, gender diverse groups and those experiencing socio-economic deprivation, disability, ill health, or isolation.

Through an inclusive and community-led response to emergency management, our focus is on enabling and empowering individuals, households, organisations, and businesses to build their resilience, paying particular attention to those people and groups who may be disproportionately affected by disaster.

Indigenous perspectives and knowledge are essential in building disaster resilience. Time and time again during emergencies we have seen Māori carry out vital work in ensuring the welfare of their people, and those in the communities surrounding them.

We are seeking to ensure that genuine partnership with Māori is incorporated at all levels of New Zealand's emergency management system, including at the governance, planning and operational levels.

The ability of critical infrastructure systems to function during adverse conditions and quickly recover to acceptable levels of service after an event is fundamental to the wellbeing of communities.

We are seeking to better define ‘Critical Infrastructure’ in legislation so that it encompasses services that are essential for everyday life and is aligned with international best practice.

We will also modernise the expectations for Critical Infrastructure providers to prepare for and respond to disasters; and strengthen arrangements to enhance the resilience of New Zealand’s critical infrastructure through close collaboration and enhanced monitoring with Critical Infrastructure providers.

Just in the last few months New Zealand has seen massive floods, storms, fires in wetlands, and droughts right across the country. These events demonstrate the case for urgent action on climate change – action to protect lives, incomes, homes, businesses and infrastructure.
Climate effects are also known to increase existing inequalities for Māori, Pasifika, women, gender diverse, disabled people, youth, older people, and low-income groups.

We are publicly consulting on a draft national plan to help New Zealand adapt to and minimise the harmful impacts of climate change. New Zealand’s first national adaptation plan will build the foundation for adaptation action so that all sectors and communities are able to live and thrive in a changing climate. It's the first step in a clear direction for how we’ll adapt to the irreversible impacts of climate change and manage the uncertainty that it comes with.

New Zealand is committed to this both domestically and internationally. We recognize that our Pacific partners are at the front line of the impacts of climate change with sea level rise and extreme weather events. As a result we have increased support to build greater resilience to climate change – the most critical issue identified by Pacific countries – with $1.3 billion in climate finance committed at COP26 to support Pacific and other lower income countries.

Our Pacific partners are also vulnerable to non-climate hazards, highlighted by the volcanic eruption and tsunami in Tonga just a few months ago. These acute and long-term events impact all aspects of sustainability including livelihoods, health, education, and ocean wellbeing.

We recognise that the Asia-Pacific needs to have an all-hazard approach to ensure resilient communities and we support this approach. We are unable to change the exposure and vulnerability of countries, but we are able to support with the development of the coping and adaptive capacities.

We are supporting this through partnerships like the NEMA Pacific Disaster Risk Management Programme which supports Tonga, Samoa, the Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau to strengthen their disaster risk management capabilities. New Zealand also supports the AHA Centre to strengthening their disaster risk management training provided to the ASEAN Member States.

New Zealand strongly endorses the Sendai Framework and as we have been implementing it, we have found that we need to address gaps in data effectively to get an accurate understanding of the real risk we face.

We know that climate change and other hazards disproportionately impact women, especially indigenous women, and their voices need to be at the heart
of how we adapt, reduce risk and respond in a gender-inclusive way so that no one is left behind. To do this we need to consider how we collect and utilize gender disaggregated data for reporting against the Sendai Framework.

While we are here to share our own experiences, we are also here to learn from you and to build partnerships towards a more disaster resilient global community.

Dave Gawn
Chief Executive, New Zealand National Emergency Management Agency