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News



World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction

As part of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), a World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction has been organized. It will be hosted by the Government of Japan and held in Yokohama on 23–27 May 1994.

The IDNDR (1990–2000) was launched by a United Nations General Assembly resolution in December 1989. Its goal is to encourage concerted international action, especially in developing countries, to reduce loss of life, property damage, and economic and social disruption occasioned by natural disasters. The Conference will contribute to the mid-term review of the Decade in 1994, to be undertaken by the United Nations Economic and Social Council as required by the General Assembly.

The aims of the Conference are the following:

- to review IDNDR accomplishments at national, regional, and international levels;
- to chart an action program for the future;
- to exchange information on the implementation of IDNDR programs and policies;

- to increase awareness on the part of high-level officials of the importance of progress in disaster reduction policies.

An invitation to the Conference has been extended to all those involved in Decade activities, drawn from fields such as planning, finance, foreign affairs, health, engineering, civil defense, insurance, communications media, and emergency preparedness. Participants are expected to include government ministers and high-level officials, representatives of over 100 national committees and focal points for the Decade, and interested international, governmental, and nongovernmental organizations.

Countries were requested to prepare national reports by the end of 1993 on their IDNDR-related activities, in particular their efforts so far to achieve agreed-upon Decade targets and their plans for fully achieving them in the second half of the Decade. Salient points from these reports will be summarized for presentation to the Conference, as will highlights of relevant international research and other demonstration projects. It is intended that rather than being a meeting about science and technology, the Conference will be an opportunity for scientific and technical experts to provide information and advice to policy makers.

Source: IDNDR Secretariat, United Nations. World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction [brochure]. Geneva: 1993.

The Conference program will also feature topical sessions, including both oral and poster presentations, focusing on strategies for disaster mitigation. The following major topics will be reviewed: vulnerable communities, hazard-resistant construction, the inter-relationships between technological and natural hazards, economic implications of disaster reduction for sustainable development, warning systems, drought management, the effects of disasters on modern societies (megacities, information systems, communications, and insurance), and the public and private sector interface in disaster prevention and preparedness.

The topical sessions will also address actions to achieve the targets of the Dec-

ade, as specified by the IDNDR Scientific and Technical Committee and adopted by the UN General Assembly. The targets are that by the year 2000, all countries should have in place: (1) a comprehensive national assessment of risks from natural hazards, which is taken into account in development plans; (2) mitigation plans at national and/or local levels, involving long-term prevention and preparedness and community awareness; and (3) ready access to global, regional, national, and local warning systems and broad dissemination of warnings.

It is hoped that the Conference will be a major step toward achieving the goal stated in its theme—"A Safer World for the 21st Century."



First Inter-American Water Day

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The Pan American Health Organization, in cooperation with the Inter-American Association of Sanitary and Environmental Engineering (AIDIS) and the Caribbean Water and Wastewater Association (CWWA), sponsored the Region's first Inter-American Water Day on Saturday, 2 October 1993. This event—which is to be celebrated annually on the first Saturday of October—highlighted the importance of water as one of the key factors in good health. The purpose of Inter-American Water Day is to educate the general public about the proper and efficient use of water and to encourage the development of permanent activities at the community level that emphasize conservation and protection of water resources.

This special observance was created through an Inter-American Water Day

Declaration signed by the three sponsoring organizations at the XXIII Inter-American AIDIS Congress in Havana, Cuba, held in November 1992. The Declaration calls on all governments, international agencies, nongovernmental organizations, municipalities, private sector entities, and communities to take advantage of Inter-American Water Day to "call attention to the problems relating to drinking water supply and the conservation and protection of water resources." The Declaration urges these groups to use the Day as an opportunity to carry out public education and information activities to heighten awareness of how individuals can contribute to the conservation of water and protect themselves against waterborne diseases.

The onset of the cholera epidemic in Peru in early 1991, less than 40 days after