



Organization of  
American States



SUMMITS OF THE AMERICAS VIRTUAL COMMUNITY

OEA/Ser.E  
CVC/FV-2/11  
2 November 2011  
Original: Spanish

## VIRTUAL FORUM ON NATURAL DISASTERS

(Report of the Virtual Forum held from October 4 to November 4, 2011)

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The following summary presents an overview of the main observations and recommendations from the virtual consultation **Summit Talk: Hemispheric Cooperation to Combat Natural Disaster**, launched by the Summits of the Americas Secretariat between October 4<sup>th</sup> and November 4<sup>th</sup> 2011.

The virtual consultation was moderated by Mr. Juan Carlos Orrego from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and among the participants were 202 users from 30 different countries, which included 24 OAS Member States. There was especially an active participation of representatives from multilateral organizations, members of the academia, civil society organizations (CSOs), networks of CSOs, and the private sector.

The Forum allowed an enriching dialogue, where information and diverse experiences on disaster risk management in the Hemisphere were exchanged, along with an analysis on current developments of the topic, the causes of natural disasters, institutional weaknesses and strengths, and improvement proposals.

The Forum participants made recognition to the host country of the Sixth Summit of the Americas for the selection of Natural Disasters as one of the central themes of the Summit, and as well for allowing the participation of civil society in its preparation. Thus, emphasizing the usefulness of the Virtual Forum as both a political communication tool and regional dialogue mechanism.

### 2. MAIN COMMENTS AND CONCERNS FROM PARTICIPANTS

The Forum participants expressed their concern on the disproportionate increase of natural disasters in their respective countries, its effects on society, and especially on the vulnerable and excluded sectors of the population. The difficulties faced by women, indigenous communities, afro-descendants and the denominated- sexual minorities, were also illustrated. They coincided with the view that climate change will cause further disasters and impact to the sources of income of the poor, which are the most vulnerable to climate change, such as agriculture and fishing.

Attention was drawn to the importance of addressing not only the consequences but also the causes of disasters. Among the causes of these risks are the practices of informal territory occupation, the lack of planning and governability, the frailty of policies related to the construction of safe housing, the insufficient local capacities to manage the territory, and the law institutionalization. Some of the participants coincided in affirming that it is necessary to generate development models that are less media focused and more development oriented, as well as to promote solidarity and cooperation at the community level.

The need to change ideas and social behaviors in relation to disasters were persistently identified at the Forum. It was agreed upon that it is necessary to change the mindset that disasters are a natural cause, to a view that disasters are a product of human interaction with the environment. At the same time, it is necessary to change the role of States when facing disasters, so that they can move away from a reactive approach and more to supportive, proactive and coordinated role with one another. In this way, States should actively participate in the mitigation and correction of risks, and in the management of crisis and post-disaster recovery.

It was highlighted the institutional vulnerabilities that jeopardize the effectiveness of risk management. Many of these vulnerabilities are already evident in the lack of importance that is given to disaster prevention programs, as well as the lack of sustainability for them. Corruption is also a risk, along with the presence of political clientelism in handling emergency aid. The deficiency among political actors belonging to different parties and territories, and the lack of public and social control mechanisms to manage risk have also made disaster risk management less effective.

### **3. MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROPOSALS**

In order to overcome the challenges previously mentioned it has been proposed:

- To seize the political role of the Summit of the Americas and of the OAS to request governments to compromise in the strengthening and modernization of public policies, and also to foster the renewal of regulations at the national level that focus on risk management and climate change.
- To propel the inclusion of risk management in the development agenda and land legislation.
- To engage governments in the harmonization and the mutual reinforcement of policies, strategies and plans related to climate change, environmental and water resource management, land legislation, and the social management of risks.
- To develop a broad program for hemispheric cooperation, with regional and subregional cooperation programs and the exchange of experiences to promote development at the political, technical and social aspects of disaster management.
- To create scholarship programs to fulfill the growing demand for experts in the fields of disaster management and climate change, so as to increase the availability of human resources in these fields at both a local and regional level.

- To strengthen policies and educational programs, and make public information available to develop a disaster risk mitigation culture that will grant the private sector a bigger role, and allow a greater and more dynamic participation of society.
- To strengthen the role of youth and children in local risk management and in the adaptation to climate change, in this way allowing them to recognize their potential to bring change at a family and social level.
- To declare and promote a five-year plan in Natural Risk Reduction in the Americas, aiming at creating a joint political impact and a culture of disaster risk management.
- To promote the articulation of risk management policies along with social assistance and protection policies that will converge towards the most vulnerable social groups.