

Pacific Islanders make their case in Geneva

Written by Naomi Jackson

Thursday, 26 May 2011 11:00 - Last Updated Tuesday, 31 May 2011 11:26



Pacific Island delegates told participants attending the Third Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction that their countries and territories remain highly disaster prone and that the region is threatened by a variety of natural hazards of geological and meteorological origin, according to Dr. Russell Howorth, Director SOPAC, a division of SPC. Dr. Howorth was part of the Pacific delegation included in the 2,700 representatives from 168 governments who attended the conference convened by the UN International Secretariat for Disaster Reduction (UN-ISDR) in Geneva 9-13 May.

UN Secretary General Ban ki-Moon, who was the keynote speaker, noted that the aim of the conference was to reduce disaster risk through technology, knowledge and economic tools, and called for accelerating efforts in building resilience and a coalition of action for disaster risk reduction.

“The Pacific Islanders,” Dr. Howorth said, “highlighted the dangers that confront the region including earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, cyclones, river and coastal flooding (including permanent coastal inundation due to sea level rise), landslides, and droughts.

“Pacific delegates recognized that in the past decade social problems, including health and pollution hazards, and civil unrest have also increased as a result of population increase, urban drift, uneven wealth distribution and political pressures.

“Tropical cyclones and other extreme events (floods, droughts, extreme temperatures) remain the most frequent cause of disasters in the region, but geological hazards and other

Pacific Islanders make their case in Geneva

Written by Naomi Jackson

Thursday, 26 May 2011 11:00 - Last Updated Tuesday, 31 May 2011 11:26

anthropogenic hazards (fire, chemical spills or infrastructure collapse) have the potential to cause greater losses, as recent tsunamis and inter-island ferry disasters have demonstrated

“Furthermore, delegates highlighted that natural hazards by themselves do not cause disasters. It is the combination of an exposed, vulnerable and ill-prepared population with a hazard event that results in a disaster.”

Dr Howorth said that a changing global climate is increasing disaster risks in two ways.

“First, climate change will likely increase the frequency and/or severity of weather and climate hazards. Second, climate change through slow onset processes will simultaneously increase communities’ vulnerability to natural hazards due to the combined effects of ecosystem degradation, reduced availability of water for ecosystems and agriculture, and changes in peoples’ livelihoods,” he said.

The Pacific delegates acknowledged that development within such an environment continues to be an on going challenge, and expressed their gratitude to regional and global development partners and donors for their support.

“It is my view that delegates presented an excellent case, and demonstrated quite clearly that the Pacific islands were not in “catch up mode” with the global agenda, but rather were in “keep up mode”. This is a credit to the efforts of generally small island administrations and supporting stakeholders,” said Dr. Howorth.

Dr. Howorth said that attention in the region would now shift to Auckland where the Regional Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction will be hosted by New Zealand, during the first week of August.

“Over 100 delegates from over the region together with global partners are expected to review progress, and in particular consider how the outcomes from the Geneva Global Platform can be turned into benefits for our region.”

Pacific Islanders make their case in Geneva

Written by Naomi Jackson

Thursday, 26 May 2011 11:00 - Last Updated Tuesday, 31 May 2011 11:26

As part of the conference i, Dr. Howorth represented the Pacific at the Heads of Intergovernmental Organisations Meeting convened during the Global Platform.

“At that meeting,” he said, “delegates took note of the recent extreme and catastrophic events and the need for more and urgent attention for disaster risk reduction considerations to be incorporated into the development planning process.”

He said that they also recognized the increasing vulnerability and need to build resilience of small island developing states and least developed countries

Several of the outcomes of that meeting are particularly relevant to the Pacific region, he said.

He said that it was suggested that greater efforts be made to use information management and communications technologies to deepen national and regional cooperation, the sharing of knowledge, managing and identifying risks that cross island country boundaries (like cyclones), and to set common standards and indicators in support of measuring progress with mainstreaming disaster risk reduction.

For further information contact the newsroom@sopac.org