



UNDMT Speech on Thimphu Disaster Management Planning Workshop

14 June 2006, Thimphu, Bhutan

Mr. Dorji Nidup, Deputy Thrompon of Thimphu City Corporation, Dasho Sonam Tenzin, DG of Department of Local Governance, monk body, distinguished guests and participants from various sectors, institutions, non-governmental organizations, development partners, UN colleagues, ladies and gentlemen. Kuz Zampo le.

On behalf of the United Nations Disaster Management Team, it is my pleasure and honor to join you at this very critical workshop on Disaster Management Planning for Thimphu City.

The first disaster related event in Thimphu, in which I participated was the Tsunami Walk. It was organized by a group of voluntary organizations to support the victims of Tsunami disaster in our region.

I remember that the Tsunami relief movement in Thimphu was initiated by small children who heard and saw the victims of Tsunami through TVs and news. That time, I asked myself why we, educated adults, needed to wait for small children to tell us what we, humans and neighbors, should be doing in face of such catastrophic human tragedy.

The establishment and appointment of the Department of Local Governance under the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs as the focal point for Disaster Management in Bhutan was, therefore, a very encouraging step forward taken by the Royal Government.

I still remember when Dasho Sonam Tenzin visited our UN Disaster Management Team with the request to arrange a field visit to one of Tsunami affected countries to observe and understand the impacts of a disaster and operation of disaster relief on the ground.

It was a rather pleasant surprise for me that somebody at his level had such a strong conviction and willingness to personally be engaged in the most frontline operations of disaster relief.

Thereafter, the Bhutan delegation participated in the World Conference for Disaster Reduction in Kobe in January 2005, and presented the National Report on Disaster Management. On his return, Dasho went on to Colombo, Sri Lanka, where he witnessed on-going relief activities on the ground. We all felt very encouraged by such leadership and commitment demonstrated by Dasho.

In Thimphu, we have recently supported the Ministry of Works and Human Settlement in earthquake risk management. Through a risk assessment of buildings, it is found that many buildings in Thimphu are not meeting the required level of earthquake or disaster resistance.

As you may be aware, the earthquake itself is not the killer. Its greatest threat is the destruction of buildings, and it is the collapsing buildings, which kill the people. In Kobe earthquake, it was well known fact that most old buildings and some new buildings which did not meet the required level of resistance collapsed and killed more than 5000 lives. Fire is also one of the major killers in such disasters.

While we may not be able to effectively prevent the occurrence of natural hazards, we will certainly be able to mitigate the impacts of such hazards on our lives, houses and properties through ensuring the quality standards, reducing vulnerability and exposure to such risks and inculcating preparedness among all citizens and families for such emergency situations.

I believe that the preparation of Thimphu Disaster Management Plan is an important step forward following the direction and guidance provided in the recently approved National Disaster Risk Management Framework, which will be presented by Dasho Sonam Tenzin.

As a disaster affects each and every one of us and our neighbors, an effective and successful disaster risk management can only be undertaken by concerted efforts of all of us, the government, NGOs, private sector, development partners, and the citizens of this rapidly growing city of Thimphu. UN Disaster Management Team consisting of all resident UN agencies in Bhutan would be privileged to continue our support to such concerted efforts.

Before concluding my remark, I would like to thank the City Corporation, the Director General and his disaster management team of the Department of Local Governance as well as all relevant organizations and participants here for your initiative and commitment to make Thimphu, which is our city and the nerve center of Bhutan, **a safe and happy place.**

Thank you and Tashi Delek!!