

**WMO STATEMENT AT THE OPENING OF THE
5TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON FLOOD MANAGEMENT**

**by M. Jarraud
Secretary-General of WMO
(Tokyo, 27 September 2011)**

Excellency,

Dr Mitsuhiro Hatori, Permanent Representative of Japan with WMO,

Distinguished Guests,

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be in Tokyo on the occasion of the 5th International Conference on Flood Management (ICFM5), a key international forum focusing almost entirely on flood-related issues and contributing to bring together practitioners, researchers and decision-makers, in particular to exchange experiences and to collaborate widely.

I wish to express my appreciation to the organizer, the International Centre for Water Hazard and Risk Management (ICHRM), and to thank the United Nations University (UNU) for hosting today's session in its attractive headquarters building. I would also like to congratulate Japan, a steadfast WMO Member since 11 August 1953, for its traditional emphasis on water resources management.

It would be inconsiderate for me not to briefly express the sympathy of WMO to Japan, through Your Excellency, for the tragic events which impacted your country in March 2011. Much as we regret the individual suffering and massive damages caused by the three connected disasters: a major earthquake, a devastating tsunami and a nuclear accident, as well as the impact of winter conditions on the rescue operations, which further augmented the distress of the affected population, I sincerely wish to express the admiration of WMO for the opportune actions taken which prevented the magnitude of this tragedy from mounting higher still.

Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Floods can pose taxing hazards to human lives and property, but in many parts of the world societies are increasingly taking advantage of river basins and other flooding-prone areas as vehicles for development, in particular to augment floodplain productivity. Accordingly, societies are more and more willing to assume the risk of coexisting with flooding, an approach which also lends itself readily to the participative themes of risk management, vulnerability and capacity building. However, climate variability and change shall increasingly modify the relative magnitude of these risks, which will be especially critical in coastal areas on account of altered storm patterns and sea-level rise, to the point that in these areas the past experience may no longer be a trustworthy indicator for the future.

The ICFM is a well-established recurring forum on flood issues. From the 1st International Symposium on Flood Defence, held in Germany (Kassel, 2000), to the present Conference on Flood Management, there has been a clear emphasis shift, from control to management, to

maximize the economic and social benefits in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of natural systems.

In the course of this process, the 3rd symposium of the series highlighted the need for an integrated approach to flood management, as maintained by the WMO and Global Water Partnership jointly-supported Associated Programme on Flood Management (APFM), and so the 4th symposium agreed on the appropriateness of a forum name change.

Considerable international efforts are converging to assist nations and regions in their water-related challenges. I have already mentioned the APFM and I could equally refer to the WMO/UNESCO International Flood Initiative and the High-Level Expert Panel on Water and Disaster/ UNSGAB (HLEP), convened at the request of the UN Secretary General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation (UNSGAB) in the context of the Hashimoto Action Plan.

However, there is still need for more international initiatives in flood risk reduction; in particular, to develop renewed methodologies and experience exchange in integrated flood management, and to bridge the gap between the flood research & development community and the experts who are ultimately responsible for mitigating and responding to the adverse impact of major flood events.

Efficient early warning systems, specially designed to dependably deliver accurate predictions on the likelihood of flood events and to support the preparations to respond to critical flood situations, are not currently receiving all the investments they warrant as key risk reduction tools. New technological developments will need to be implemented to further expand our understanding of the climate system and to improve our forecasting and warning capabilities for flood events.

Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is especially gratifying to note that the topics to be discussed at this conference encompass a very wide spectrum of vital issues and I am indeed confident that your multidisciplinary deliberations will decisively contribute to identify the future needs of flood management research, as well as all optimal trans-boundary methodologies in terms of technical, institutional, financial and public-private partnership arrangements.

I wish all the participants and the organizers a most successful Conference.

Thank you.
