

# Beyond the International Decade

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The journal endeavours to provide an information sharing forum for all those involved in emergency management. Contributions relating to Australian and international emergency activities, articles identifying and discussing issues, policies, planning or procedural concerns, research reports and any other information relevant to the emergency and disaster management community are welcome.

The aim of this publication is the exchange of information and views across the Australian emergency management community, therefore, the views expressed in this journal should not be taken to be the views of Emergency Management Australia.

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December 1999 marked the end of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR). The Decade had the challenging aim of 'reducing loss of life, property damage and social and economic disruption caused by disasters, especially in developing countries, through concerted international action in the 1990s and beyond'.

Throughout the Decade, Australia has been an active participant. Our IDNDR program has been supported and developed through a widely-representative national coordination committee and a full-time secretariat within EMA. The program provided funds for over 150 natural disaster reduction projects in Australia, the Pacific Region and internationally under the IDNDR umbrella.

Last September Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations, in his annual message to member states focussed on the need for a culture of prevention—a major IDNDR theme. He noted that poverty rather than choice can drive people to live in disaster-prone areas and, in order for disaster-prevention strategies to be truly effective, they needed to be integrated into overall development policies. He also drew on the IDNDR experience to conclude that successful longer-term prevention strategies required broad-based, cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary cooperation.

In July last year a major international forum was held in Geneva to review IDNDR achievements over the last 10 years and to identify a path forward. There was widespread agreement that the key to limiting the economic and social costs of disasters is to put even greater efforts into prevention activities. The conference endorsed a strategy for action entitled 'A Safer World for the 21st Century: Disaster and Risk Reduction'. It contains four goals:

- Increase public awareness of the risks that natural, technological and environmental hazards pose to modern societies.
- Obtain commitment by public authorities to reduce risks to people, their

livelihoods, social and economic infrastructure, and environmental resources.

- Engage public participation at all levels of implementation to create disaster-resistant communities through increased partnership and expanded risk reduction networks at all levels.
- Reduce the economic and social losses of disasters as measured, for example, by Gross National Product.

These broad goals are supported by 12 more specific objectives which provide a road map for further national action. To continue the impetus of IDNDR, the United Nations is to establish an Inter Agency Task Force and an Inter Agency Secretariat. This is good news as it will provide a continuing focus on disaster reduction at the highest levels of the United Nations.

Within Australia, the National Emergency Management Committee (NEMC) at its meeting last November commended the Safer World Strategy for implementation nationally. The NEMC also agreed that it would review progress annually on action taken in pursuing the Safer World Strategy.

The International Decade has passed, but its legacy lives on. During the last 10 years there has been a significant action in Australia to prevent disasters and mitigate their effects. However, there continues to be a need for further concerted efforts in these areas.

In so doing, we need to take account of the Secretary-General's plea to integrate disaster prevention strategies with development policies and to involve the widest range of communities, disciplines and all levels of government in achieving the collective aim of disaster reduction.

We have increasingly recognised the importance of disaster reduction in the last decade. The next 10 years will be the real test of our resolve to truly adopt a culture of prevention within Australia.

**Alan Hodges**  
 Director General  
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