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Trilateral Forum Highlights NGOs' Key Role in Dire Situations

By Jamshed Baruah



Sendai Trilateral Forum | Credit: Katsuhiro Asagiri

BERLIN | SENDAI - Tearing down ideological barriers and overcoming historical animosities, civil society organisations from Japan, China and the Republic of Korea participated in a landmark trilateral forum during the [Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction \(WCDRR\)](#).

The conference, held from March 14 to 18 in Sendai – the centre of Japan’s Tohoku region that bore the brunt of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami leading to the Fukushima nuclear power plant catastrophe – agreed on a new framework for the next 15 years (2015-2030) to reduce the risk of disasters that kill and destroy livelihoods.

The trilateral forum was one of the major events, organised by Soka Gakkai International (SGI), a lay Buddhist organisation based in Tokyo, during the WCDRR. It provided a platform for fostering people-to-people

cooperation in Northeast Asia to reduce risks of disasters. Their total economic impact worldwide amounted to 1.4 trillion dollars between 2005 and 2014.

According to observers, the forum initiated a powerful move towards trilateral cooperation that could serve as a model beyond regional boundaries.

Explaining the rationale behind the March 16 forum, Feng Chen from the Seoul-based [Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat \(TCS\)](#), said: “The three countries . . . continue to suffer disproportionately from various types of disasters caused by natural hazards.” >>

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As neighbouring countries in the region, Japan, China and the ROK should work together to reduce the risk of “dreadful disasters”, he said and affirmed the commitment of TCS to do so.

The need for cooperation between the three Northeast Asian countries was stressed also by Haoming Huang, vice chairman and executive director of the non-profit 126 member organisation operating nationwide, the [China Association for NGO Cooperation \(CANGO\)](#), which was founded in 1992, and enjoys special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations.

“CANGO's mission is to create a strong, empowered network of Chinese NGOs to address poverty alleviation, environmental protection and social development, particularly in China's poor, remote and minority-inhabited areas,” according to Haoming Huang.

Another participant in the Forum was Young-Jin Park, the current Secretary General of the [Korean Disaster Relief Association, The Hope Bridge](#).

He said it was the nation's first relief organization founded voluntarily by key figures in the media and other parts of society, without any set religion or ideology, in 1961, when there was no culture of emergency relief and sharing in Korea.

With a half-century of emergency relief work and specialized activities, the organization has separated its emergency relief efforts into domestic and overseas efforts, and is providing effective relief according to the type of disaster, region and target.

Aoi Horiuchi, the Secretary General of the Japan CSO Coalition 2015 Committee in preparation for the 3rd World Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDDR), also participated in the forum. He has since 2012 been a member of the Research and Proposal Group of the non-profit, non-partisan networking [Japan NGO Center for International Cooperation \(JANIC\)](#) founded in 1987.

He is involved in coordination between the NGO Conferences and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as the advocacies of the Millennium Development Goals.

Daisuke Namaki of the [Next Stage Tohoku Coop](#) was another participant in the trilateral forum. Born in Osaka in 1973, he had experienced the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995 in Kobe, Japan.

Since 2002 he has been engaged in a government policy-based business of accommodating intern trainees from Asian countries and introducing them to Japanese companies. Since 2006 he has served as Representative Director of the Next Stage Tohoku Coop.

Reflecting the valour of the people of the region, the Tohoku Soka Gakkai organised a panel exhibition, ‘The Light of Humanity’, featuring 22 individuals who are struggling to overcome the tragedy of the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011 and making efforts toward restoration.

Commending the trilateral forum, SGI Executive Director for Peace Affairs Hirotsugu Terasaki said it had manifested “highly fulfilling exchanges of opinion . . . about the various trends and characteristics that are emerging within civil society” in the three countries.

“This has reinforced my conviction that a more resilient community can be forged when civil societies offer complimentary support towards one another,” Terasaki said.

Referring to the Sustainable Development Goals, which are scheduled to be endorsed in September, Terasaki pointed out that SGI President Daisaku Ikeda had urged in his peace proposal 2015 China, South Korea and Japan to “join together to create a regional model that will embody best practices that can be shared with the world, including those relating to the development of human talent”.

“It goes without saying that an active flow of people as well as cultural and economic exchange is already widespread among these three countries, which hold between them a population of approximately 1.5 billion. On that basis, trilateral cooperation regarding specific challenges, including disaster prevention, will not only contribute to the security and stability of this region, but also resonate positively within the international community,” said Terasaki. >>

Watch video interview > <http://www.ipsnews.net/2015/03/a-chinese-ngo-promotes-people-to-people-cooperation-in-northeast-asia/>

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More specifically, he added, the kind of trilateral cooperation concerning disaster prevention, as had been discussed in the trilateral forum, would not only be beneficial in terms of simply dealing with future disaster response, but could certainly, in a more broader sense, make a contribution toward setting a clear example across the entire global society, he added.

SGI also organised together with the [ACT Alliance](#) and Japan Religion Coordinating Project for Disaster Relief (JRPD) a symposium titled 'Community based DRR (disaster risk reduction) from a faith-based perspective – sharing best practices'. This was a follow-up of a side event at the 6th Asian Ministerial Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction (AMCDRR) held in June 2014 in Bangkok, Thailand.

ACT Alliance's general secretary John Nduna said that the role of faith-based organizations (FBOs) in disaster risk reduction is not always recognized and that international frameworks such as the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) only have impact when they benefit the people at the grassroots level.

Nobuyuki Asai, chair of the Soka Gakkai Youth Peace Conference, spoke on the capacity of FBOs to mobilize existing community networks and to protect the vulnerable in times of emergency.

On March 16, as an outcome document of the symposium, 13 FBOs issued a [statement](#) in which they called on governments to recognize



[IDN-InDepthNews – March 31, 2015]

Photo: A view of Symposium on 'Community based DRR from a faith-based perspective – sharing best practices'
Credit: SGI

the unique role of Local Faith Communities (LFCS) and FBOs and to give priority to the engagement and collaboration of both in the implementation of the post-2015 framework on DRR.

Two days later, Kimiaki Kawai, Program Director of Peace Affairs for SGI, gave a presentation at the WCDRR's IGNITE Stage on Soka Gakkai's relief efforts in Tohoku following the Great East Japan Earthquake.

He highlighted the ability of FBOs to utilize their existing networks of communication and their local facilities in disaster response. He emphasized that the strengths and resources of FBOs could complement those of other DRR stakeholders.

The importance of FBOs was underlined by the [Pew Research Center](#) in 2012, when it found that faith, in all its forms, constitutes a natural and important element in the lives of billions of people with over 84 percent of the world identifying with a religious group. Faith drives people to take action.

Kimiaki said, as discussed during this WCDRR, there are numerous good examples of the added value of Local Faith Communities and Faith-Based Organizations in responding to disasters all over the world, including the Ebola crisis in West Africa, conflict in South Sudan and Central African Republic, the Great East Japan Earth Quake, Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu, and the flooding in southeast Asia. <>

UNDP Unveils Blueprint for Swift, Unified Crisis Response

By Ramesh Jaura



UNDP Assistant Administrator Izumi Nakamitsu, Director of the Crisis Response Unit

SENDAI, Japan - The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has announced a new 10-year global plan to support country efforts to reduce the risk of disasters that kill people and destroy livelihoods. The plan was unveiled at the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction which ended on Mar. 18.

“Called ‘5-10-50’, the programme will support countries and communities to deliver better risk-informed development, and targets 50 countries over 10 years, with a focus on five critical areas: risk awareness and early warning; risk-governance and mainstreaming; preparedness; resilient recovery; and local/urban risk reduction,” UNDP Administrator Helen Clark said at a special event on Mar. 17 in Sendai, in the centre of Japan’s Tohoku region, which bore the brunt of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami that led to the Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster.

The UNDP also launched a new report at Sendai, titled ‘Strengthening Disaster Risk Governance: UNDP Support during the HFA Implementation Period 2005 – 2015’.

The report is a review of UNDP support in 125 disaster-prone countries since 2005, and draws on detailed findings from a selection of 17 countries. The findings from the report are to be used in the development of the new programme. >>

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Following are excerpts of an IPS interview in which the UNDP Assistant Administrator Izumi Nakamitsu, who heads the agency's Crisis Response Unit, explains what this Unit in particular and the agency in general are doing to reduce disaster risk (Interview transcript by Josh Butler at IPS U.N. Bureau in New York):

IPS: What was the idea behind setting up the Crisis Response Unit, and what does it do?

Izumi Nakamitsu (IN): UNDP is obviously a development cooperation organisation. But if you look at the world, there are so many crises. We have to make sure we become, or are, a development cooperation organisation that can also respond to crises properly and fast. If you can respond quickly to crises, you can from the start put perspectives of early recovery and also resilience. We can actually become much more strategic in the way the international community can actually respond to crises.

You hear this terminology of 'fit for purpose.' U.N. organisations need to change with the changing environment and context. That was the reasoning behind this rather dramatic restructuring of UNDP (in October 2014). As one of the outcomes, it's not the only one, is a new entity called the crisis response unit.

We make sure UNDP actually takes a whole of UNDP approach. The crisis response perspectives and early recovery perspectives are integrated into everything that we do in development work. Our role is to make sure that, by becoming a sort of crisis coordinator, different parts of UNDP will be responding collectively so that we actually take the whole of UNDP approach.

I should also emphasise it's not just a natural disaster context. In fact, if you look at the number of victims of humanitarian crises, 70-80 percent are in a conflict setting. It's much more complicated to respond to that sort of crisis.

IPS: So disaster risk reduction is one complement of your activities?

IN: Risk reduction perspective has to be integrated into everything we do. The whole development actions will have to be risk-informed. All parts of UNDP are integrating perspectives.

It's not just my little unit that coordinates and manages a crisis response, but there's a large team that is specifically looking at how to mainstream DRR (disaster risk reduction) perspectives into everything UNDP does. It's not just the crisis context. It has to be part of normal development work.

It makes sense, doesn't it? If you can actually invest in DRR, you don't actually have to spend so much money after the crisis to feed the population. We think it makes sense to integrate and mainstream these DRR perspectives throughout the development process.

IPS: How does the cooperation function in this case?

IN: Obviously we have to work together. A lot of the risk reduction part is to create a national sort of legal framework on the ground in different countries. We still have very good disaster management law, for example. We have been working quite a lot; in 70-80 percent of our programme countries, UNDP has been part of preparing that legislative framework to properly invest in DRR.

But that's only the beginning of the work. We have to then create the actual capacities at the country level, so that this legislation will actually have an impact in terms of DRR.

IPS: And that's more difficult?

IN: I wouldn't say it's difficult. It takes time. It's about capacity building. For that to happen, we need to have good partners on the ground that are engaged with those stakeholders.

I was meeting with the secretary general of the federation of Red Cross societies, they have huge strength, because they have national chapters, national committees, who will be implementing those things in terms of capacity building. We have been partnering with them also in terms of preparing legislation as well. >>

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The next step is to create capacities on the ground. We're doing a lot of that. We think it makes sense to invest in those types of activities. We can't prevent disasters. That is not possible. But if we can minimise the risk, we can manage the impact, then probably much smaller humanitarian interventions would be required. The whole international support will probably become much more sustainable.

IPS: Disaster prone countries lack funds, they also lack technologies. These will have to come from rich and industrialised countries. Isn't that a problem?

IN: Of course . . . Japan just pledged 4 billion USD during the conference (as a gesture of goodwill). But it's not just about the amount of money . . . There will have to be an understanding on the part of all governments that they have to invest in building DRR frameworks. They have to invest in building resilience and ensuring that resilience. It's not just the amount of money but how you spend it.

IPS: *It's the old debate, the effectiveness.*

IN: 2015 is a critical year: especially on the eve of (the finance for development meeting in) Addis Ababa, many countries are looking at what it is that they will have to agree. Sendai is the first one.

IPS: *What would you suggest developing countries should expect from Addis?*

IN: Let's hope these intergovernmental processes will produce a strong enough policy framework that will actually fully recognise that these are in fact DRR, development concerns, and will be treated as such. Also that the countries will understand, you need to actually make investments in resilience and risk reduction.

But also, for UNDP, it's very important that policy frameworks will not just be policy frameworks working in abstract. They have to be something that can be implemented in a concrete way on the ground in a country.

We have invested 2 billion USD in the last 10 years in this area, DRR. In terms of implementation capacity, we are the one who will have to actually take those policy frameworks, look at them, and reflect them into our country programmes. Our work will probably be much more intense when these frameworks are ready.

We will have to take them and operationalise them. Those are the hopes. These are all intergovernmental processes. We're here to support the governments and inform, in our view, what works and what doesn't work that well. And feeding those perspectives into government delegations in the form of advice.

IPS: *We are entering the minefield, where it's a question of: what does international cooperation achieve?*

IN: I think national governments also have a huge responsibility, but that's why we work with them. We are the largest partner of those governments, especially in DRR areas. I talked about disaster management laws in different countries.

That's a prime example of governments taking their responsibilities and then creating the capacities to make sure these legislative frameworks will actually have an impact and work with them also. (National) Governments' responsibilities and our support, they are probably both sides of the same coin. (IPS | IDN | 19 March 2015)

Watch the full interview on video

<http://www.ipsnews.net/2015/03/undp-assistant-administrator-izumi-nakamitsu-explains-what-the-crisis-response-unit-does/>

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Key to Preventing Disasters Lies in Understanding Them

By Ramesh Jaura

SENDAI, Japan - The Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction concluded on Wednesday after a long drawn-out round of final negotiations, with representatives of 187 U.N. member states finally agreeing on what is being described as a far-reaching new framework for the next 15 years: 2015-2030.

But whether the adoption of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) heralds the dawn of a new era – fulfilling U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s expectation on the opening day of the conference on Mar. 14 that “sustainability starts in Sendai” – remains to be seen.

Margareta Wahlström, the U.N. Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Head of the U.N. Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), has emphasised that the new framework “opens a major new chapter in sustainable development as it outlines clear targets and priorities for action which will lead to a substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health”.

But she warned in an interview to IPS that implementation of the new framework “will require strong commitment and political leadership and will be vital to the achievement of future agreements on sustainable development goals [in September] and climate later this year [in December in Paris]”. The new framework outlines seven global targets and four priorities. >>



Watch the video interview <http://www.ipsnews.net/2015/03/unisdrs-margareta-wahlstrom-on-the-nitty-gritty-of-disaster-risk-reduction/>

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The global targets to be achieved over the next 15 years are: “a substantial reduction in global disaster mortality; a substantial reduction in numbers of affected people; a reduction in economic losses in relation to global GDP; substantial reduction in disaster damage to critical infrastructure and disruption of basic services, including health and education facilities; an increase in the number of countries with national and local disaster risk reduction strategies by 2020; enhanced international cooperation; and increased access to multi-hazard early warning systems and disaster risk information and assessments.”

The four priorities for action are focussed on a better understanding of risk, strengthened disaster risk governance and more investment. A final priority calls for more effective disaster preparedness and embedding the ‘build back better’ principle into recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.

Following are excerpts of an IPS interview with UNISDR head Margareta Wahlström during which she explained the nitty-gritty of DRR. (*Interview transcript by Josh Butler at IPS U.N. Bureau in New York.*):

IPS: Do you think this conference would come out with solutions to reduce disaster risk?

Margareta Wahlström (MW): The conference and the collective experience has got all the solutions. That’s not really our problem. Our problem is to make a convincing argument for applying the knowledge we already have. It has to do with individuals, with society, with business, et cetera. Not to make it an oversimplified agenda, because it’s quite complex.

If you really want to reduce risks sustainably, you have to look at many different sectors, and not individually, but they have to work together. I can see myself, I can hear, there has been a lot of progress over this 10 years.

One of the critical thresholds to cross is moving from the disaster to the risk understanding. I think we can all understand the disaster superficially, but that’s not really what will reduce the risk in future. What will reduce risk is if we understand the risks, and not just one risk, but several risks working together to really undermine society.

That’s what this conference is about. As much as it is about negotiating a document, now laying the ground for work in the coming decades, it is also about people learning very rapidly from each other, allowing themselves to be inspired.

IPS: An important issue is resilience. The poor and vulnerable have always shown resilience. But what we need to strengthen their resilience are money and technology. Do you see these two things happening as a result of this conference?

MW: Not only because of the conference. If anything, the conference will up the priorities, increase the under-

standing of the necessary integration of planning. In any case, historical experience shows the most critical foundation stone for resilience is social development and economic development. People need to be healthy, well educated, have choices, have jobs. With that follows, of course, in a way, new risks, as we know. Lifestyle risks.

I think the technology is there. The issue of technology is more its availability, that can be an issue of money but it can also an issue of capacity on how to use technology. Which, for many countries and individuals, is really an issue. We need to look at ourselves. The evolution of technology is faster than people’s ability to use it.

Financial resources to acquire it can definitely be a limitation, but an even bigger limitation in many cases is capacity. If you think of money in terms of government’s own investments, which is the most critical one, I think we will see that increasing, as the understanding of what it is you do when you build for resilience, that means risk sensitive infrastructure, risk sensitive agriculture, water management systems. It’s not a standalone issue.

I think we will see an increase in investment. Investment for individuals, for the social side of resilience, in particular the focus on the most poor people, will require a more clear cut decision of policy direction, which can very probably be helped by the agreement later in this year hopefully on the post-2015 universal development agenda.

That will, at best, help to put the focus on what needs to be done to continue the very strong focus on poverty reduction. (IPS | IDN-InDepthNews | 18 March 2015)

Sendai Conference Stresses Importance of Women's Leadership

By Jamshed Baruah and Katsuhiro Asagiri



Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe says boosting women's leadership in disaster risk reduction would be a key element of the country's new programme of international support. Credit: Katsuhiro Asagiri/IPS

SENDAI, Japan - Women play a critical role in reducing disaster risk and planning and decision-making during and after disasters strike, according to senior United Nations, government and civil society representatives. In fact, efforts at reducing risks can never be fully effective or sustainable if the needs and voices of women are ignored, they agreed.

Even at risk of their own health and well-being, women are most heavily impacted but often overcome immense obstacles to lead response efforts and provide care and support to those hit hard by disasters, said participants in a high-level multi-stakeholder Partnership Dialogue during the Third World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR) in Sendai, Japan, from Mar. 14 to 18.

Participants in the conference's first of several inter-governmental high-level partnership dialogues, on 'Mobilizing Women's Leadership in Disaster Risk Reduction', included the heads of the United Nations World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) and the United Nations Population Fund ([UNFPA](#)).

In an interview with IPS, UNFPA Executive Director Babatunde Osotimehin said the Sendai Conference offers "a new opportunity for the world to galvanise around a common disaster risk reduction agenda and commit to collective actions that put women at its centre".

The fact that serious gaps remain in the area is not for lack of guidance and tools on relevant gender-based approaches and best practices.

What is needed is requisite political will to make sure that women's voices were enhanced and participation ensured. All such efforts must bolster women's rights, included sexual and reproductive health rights, he said.
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Osoimehin pleaded for key actions at all levels, and stressed that dedicated resources are lacking and as such, money must be devoted to disaster risk reduction and women must be empowered to play a real role in that area.

He pointed out that sustained and sustainable disaster risk reduction requires an accountability framework with indicators and targets to measure progress and ensure that national and local actors move towards implementation.

A physician and public health expert, before Osoimehin became UNFPA chief in January 2011 in the rank of Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, he was Director-General of Nigeria's National Agency for the Control of AIDS, which coordinates HIV and AIDS work in a country of about 180 million people.

WFP Executive Director Ertharin Cousin underscored that the "global reset" that began on Mar. 14 in Sendai must include steps to place women at the centre of disaster risk reduction efforts.

As several other speakers and heads of governments also emphasised in several other fora, Cousin said the WCDRR is the first of a crucial series of U.N.-backed conferences and meetings set for 2015 respectively on development financing, sustainable development and climate change, all aimed at ensuring a safer and more prosperous world for all.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe echoed similar sentiments in a keynote address. He said that Japan had long understood the importance of enhancing the voice, visibility and participation of women.

For example, if a disaster struck during the middle of the day, most of the people at home would be women so their perspective is essential "absolutely essential for restoring devastated".

remain calm in our hearts," said Prime Minister Abe, quoting the powerful words of women in one of the districts he had visited in the wake of the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami, and pledging Japan's ongoing strong commitment to ensuring all women played a greater role in disaster risk reduction.

Abe announced that boosting women's leadership in disaster risk reduction would be a key element of the country's new programme of international support.

He said: "Today I announced Japan's new cooperation initiative for disaster risk reduction. Under this initiative, over the next four years, Japan will train 40,000 officials and people in local regions around the world as leaders who will play key roles in disaster risk reduction and reconstruction.

"One of the major projects that will be undertaken through this initiative is the launch of the Training to Promote Leadership by Women in Disaster Risk Reduction.

"Furthermore, at the World Assembly for Women in Tokyo to be held this summer, one of the themes will be 'Women and Disaster Risk Reduction'."

Abe said, "We are launching concrete projects in nations around the world" and would build on existing efforts to promote women's leadership in disaster risk reduction in such partner countries as Fiji, Solomon Islands, and other Pacific island nations.

"We have dispatched experts in the field of community disaster risk reduction to conduct training focusing on women over a three-year period ... Now these women have become leaders and are carrying on their own activities to spread knowledge about disaster risk reduction to other women in their communities," he said. (IPS | 16 March 2015)



<http://www.educationforglobalcitizenship.net/documents/globalcitizenshipforum.pdf>

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Cyclone Pam Prompts Action for Vanuatu at Sendai Conference

By Jamshed Baruah

SENDAI, Japan - Cyclone Pam has not only caused unprecedented damages to the Pacific island of Vanuatu but also lent urgency to U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's plea that disaster risk reduction is in "everybody's interest".

"Sustainability starts in Sendai," Ban declared at the opening of the Third World Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR), the largest-ever high-level meeting on the theme, which kicked off on Mar. 14 in Sendai, the centre of Japan's Tohoku region, which bore the brunt of the 2011 earthquake and tsunami that led to the Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster.

The conference is expected to conclude with the adoption on Mar. 18, when WCDRR is scheduled to close, of a new agreement on disaster risk reduction, which will provide guidance on how to reduce mortality and economic losses from disasters.

"This is the first stop on our journey to a new future to put our people of the world and this world onto a sustainable path," Ban told government leaders and civil society representatives from around the world.

"Disaster risk reduction advances progress on sustainable development and climate change," Ban said, adding that "climate change is intensifying the risks for hundreds of millions of people, particularly in small island developing states and coastal areas."

Experts consider climate change as the cause for the increasingly unpredictable pattern of cyclonic activity affecting Vanuatu in recent years.

"I speak to you today with a heart that is so heavy," said Vanuatu's President Baldwin Lonsdale addressing the opening session, visibly fighting back his tears. "I stand to ask you to give a lending hand in responding to this calamity that has struck us."

This is indeed a major calamity for the Pacific island nation. Every year it loses six percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) to disasters.

"This cyclone is a huge setback for the country's development. It will have severe impacts for all sectors of economic activity including tourism, agriculture and manufacturing," said Lonsdale.

"The country is already threatened by coastal erosion and rising sea levels, in addition to five active volcanos and earthquakes. This is why I am attending this conference and why Vanuatu wants to see a strong new framework on disaster risk reduction which will support us in tackling the drivers of disaster risk such as climate change."

As Vanuatu reeled under the impact of the cyclone, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan pledged four billion dollars in disaster prevention aid, mainly for developing countries.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) launched an initiative on Mar. 15 to scale up community and civic action on resilience, the so-called 'One Billion Coalition for Resilience'.

The IFRC has committed itself to mobilising its network of 189 national Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and 17 million volunteers around the world to increase different services that link disaster preparedness, emergency response and longer term recovery needs of local communities.

The Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, Margareta Wahlström, commended the IFRC's efforts to galvanise actions toward making communities more resilient.

"We need to scale up our collective efforts to make sure that hazards don't become disasters, and we will only be able to achieve this by building alliances at every level," she said.

"Only in partnership can we contribute to transforming the lives of the most vulnerable people and support their efforts in building stronger communities."

Apparently realising the need of the hour, top insurers from around the world have called on governments to step up global efforts to build resilience against >>

natural disasters, highlighting that average economic losses from disasters in the last decade have amounted



to around 190 billion dollars annually, while average insured losses were at about 60 billion dollars.

A ‘United for Disaster Resilience Statement’ was released Mar. 14 by top insurance companies, members of the UNEP Finance Initiatives’ Principles for Sustainable Insurance (PSI), the largest collaborative initiative between the United Nations and the insurance industry. PSI is backed by insurers representing about 15 percent of the world’s premium volume and nine trillion dollars in assets under its management.

The statement urges governments to adopt the U.N. Post-2015 Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction, emphasising that the insurance industry is well placed to understand the economic and social impact of disasters given that its core business is to understand, manage and carry risk.

Lauding the initiative, Achim Steiner, U.N. Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP), said: “The vision and initiative demonstrated by the insurance industry – from the launch of the landmark Principles for Sustainable Insurance at the Rio+20 conference to the strong, united commitments made here in Sendai – provide inspiration and a way forward.”

Another PSI initiative launched in Sendai called on individual insurance organisations to help implement the Post-2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction by making voluntary, specific, measurable and time-bound commitments.

The voluntary commitments will follow the global framework afforded by the four Principles for Sustainable Insurance, and will show concrete actions that build disaster resilience, and promote economic, social and environmental sustainability.

These commitments will be aggregated and promoted en route to a major UNEP and insurance industry event in May this year, which will be hosted by the global reinsurer, Swiss Re.

The commitments will also be promoted by the PSI at the Global Insurance Forum of the International Insurance Society in New York in June. The forum will include a dedicated day at the U.N. headquarters for insurance industry leaders and U.N. officials to address sustainable development challenges and opportunities, from climate change and disaster risk, to financial inclusion and ageing populations. (IPS | 16 March 2015)

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Opinion: A Radical Approach to Global Citizenship Education

By Wayne Hudson*

BRISBANE - Although global citizenship education has now received the recognition it deserves, much of the literature recycles old agendas under another name – ‘education to promote peace and justice’, ‘sustainability’, ‘care for the environment’, ‘multi-faith’ and ‘multi-cultural understanding’ – and so forth.

Another literature proposes that children learn specific global knowledge: world history, global ethics, global law etc. In my view these approaches do not grasp the revolution that global citizenship involves.

They do not rise to the level of the times and promote an approach to education which is radical enough to bring about the changes which are needed. There is also a problem about the tendency for some advocates of global citizenship education to promote political and social activism under another name.

Finally, there is a major problem about the way global citizenship education tends to be presented in Western terms, heavily indebted to the European Enlightenment. I propose an approach to global citizenship education which is much more radical and involves a new conceptuality of pedagogical practice.

Clearly I would not argue for a global citizenship education that ignores the achievements of the West or the rich heritage of the European Enlightenment. Equally, however, global citizenship education cannot be education in the Enlightenment ideology of the West.

It cannot ignore the substantive claims of Islam. It cannot pretend that Russian Orthodoxy is some sort of private option and that the Russian Federation is a secular nation state. And it must relate to the actual diversities – political, cultural and ethical – found around the world, if it is not to be yet another example of educational utopianism with only limited impact on the ground.

Global citizenship education cannot be simply Western, and it must relate to children living in poor countries and in rural environments, and not only to the children of urban elites. Many current forms of global citizenship education do not seem to address their needs.

Global citizenship education which goes beyond both Western ideology and utopian dreaming needs in my view to make two radical leaps:

First, it needs to make a post-secular leap and reconcile moderate secularity with a recognition of non-mundane performances in both public and private life. This represents a rejection of American ideology about ‘the public square’ or ‘the public sphere’. >>

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It reconnects with real world realities, and involves a model of global citizenship education which takes different spiritual perspectives seriously at the level of religious citizenship, at the level of human rights, and at the level of the role of the state.

Pious declarations which simply recite Western Enlightenment mantras about these matters will fail in practice in the Islamic world and Russia. They may not even recommend themselves to Islamic minorities in Western Europe.

In the longer term they may not be implemented in practice in much of Asia, including India, Burma and China. >>

To this extent, global citizenship needs to be more global than most writers on global citizenship education currently envisage. It needs to take cultural, religious and civilisational differences much more seriously than is currently the case.

What is at issue here is not particularism, or an irrational form of cultural relativism, but an approach that addresses actual heterogeneities and real world contexts and does not rely on Kantian moral philosophy, or on Anglo-American political philosophy.

‘Global’ cannot mean Anglo-Saxon or even European. A global approach must both respect, and to a degree explain, differences, and this implies the need for more powerful concepts than individual traditions traditionally provided. This leads on to the second leap.

In my view, global citizenship education also needs to make a leap towards a new conceptuality: one that can encompass historical and historical particularities, while also creating portability across cultures and nation states.

This is a strong claim, and one with which educationists around the world are relatively unfamiliar, even though it is possible that nothing less will adequately traverse the world of electronic media, especially social media, or allow an integration of the sciences with the humanities and the fine arts.

A new global conceptuality is not on offer in educational institutions at present, and it does not inform most thinking on educational development. This is partly because the type of thinking involved is more commonly found among mathematicians, physicists and philosophers than among professors of education.

However, it may not be that difficult to produce and exemplify such a conceptuality in pedagogic practice. Indeed, I think that it will be easier to establish this conceptuality in pedagogic practice than to explicate the new concepts in philosophical or other theoretical terms.

Here my position is substantially alternativist and obviously requires considerable exemplification. The approach I commend differs from many dominant strategies in education, which often assume that curricula should implement pre-existing educational concepts and strategies.

My approach to global citizenship education implies a very different conception of pedagogy and learning, one which paradoxically has links both with strong cognitivism of a type educationists tend not to favour and with strong pragmatism of a type they favour, but do not always practice.

It has particular links with the pragmatism of the American philosopher and mathematician Charles Sanders Peirce, as opposed to the weaker pragmatism of John Dewey, William James or Richard Rorty.

My claim is that such an unusual approach to philosophy and practice has benefits for global citizenship education. Pedagogy based on this approach has the advantage of being suited to delivery using new technologies.

It is also inexpensive, practical and easy to implement in local communities around the world. Of course, such an innovative approach may be controversial, at least until the foundations for the approach in contemporary philosophy, mathematics and cognitive science are better understood. However, this is the approach I am working on. It is one that I think can make a real contribution to the current debates. (IPS | March 13, 2015)

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Soldiers of Conscience Breaking the Silence

By Mel Frykberg

This news feature tells the story of how groups of Israelis and Palestinians are empowering communities at daggers drawn to consider themselves as part of a solution, rising above parochial interests and swimming against prevailing political tide, thus lending a vibrant local dimension to the broader concept of global citizenship.



Breaking The Silence takes a group on a tour of Hebron where they learn first hand about life under occupation. Credit: Mel Frykberg

HEBRON, West Bank – The ancient biblical city of Hebron, in the southern West Bank, is holy to Judaism, Christianity and Islam and is steeped in historical, archaeological and religious treasures. However, the hilly, windy and narrow streets, nestled among picturesque hills, belie a bitter and bloody history, and a palpable sense of tension.

The city of Abraham is now home to over 250,000 Palestinians. Less than 1,000 Israeli settlers, guarded by hundreds of Israeli soldiers, live cheek-and-jowl in the midst of the Palestinians, in an atmosphere of extreme hostility. Over the decades the hatred between the two communities has regularly descended into violence and ended in bloodshed.

In 1994 Israeli settler doctor Baruch Goldstein machine-gunned over 20 Palestinians to death as they prayed in the Ibrahimi Mosque while settlers have also been killed and wounded by Palestinians. >>

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Israel's occupation has forced hundreds of Palestinians out of their businesses and homes in the city's old market, and in Shuhada Street a main road in the city centre where Palestinians are forbidden to walk.

Israeli security forces have also been accused by various human rights organisations of abusing Palestinians and killing them unnecessarily.

It is against this background that two peace organisations, one Palestinian and one Israeli, have worked together for justice and to educate Israelis and foreigners about the life under occupation.

Breaking the Silence (BTS) is a group of veteran Israeli soldiers who have served in the Israeli military since the start of the Second Intifada, or uprising in October 2000.

The former Israeli soldiers take Israelis and tourists on tours of Hebron and explain the situation on the ground to them.

"We endeavor to stimulate public debate about the price paid for a reality in which young soldiers face a civilian population on a daily basis, and are engaged in the control of that population's everyday life," Achiya Schatz, BTS's director of public outreach told IDN.

"We explain to the tour groups that Israelis are not the victims of the occupation but that the Palestinians are."

Many of the Israeli soldiers recall abuses that were committed against Palestinians while they were serving.

"On one occasion we trashed the house of a Palestinian we thought was a 'terrorist' and he and his wife were roughed up and taken out into the street," recalled Schatz.

"We later found out we had the wrong guy. The guy we wanted was living two houses down the road."

Schatz also recalls commanders of the units being disappointed when they hadn't been able to kill a 'terrorist'.

Soldiers from BTS have provided testimony to far worse abuses and Schatz explained that what he witnessed was not exclusive to Hebron but the regular behavior of some Israeli troops throughout the West Bank when dealing with the Palestinian population.

Apart from educating Israelis about the occupation BTS also believes in building bridges with Palestinians, particularly activists.

"It is important to us to introduce Israelis to Palestinians as this helps to break down stereotypes. Often this is the first time Israelis have met Palestinians in person," said Schatz.

To this end BTS works together with a Palestinian activist group called Youth Against the Settlements (YAS)

YAS is a national Palestinian, non-partisan activist group which seeks to end Israeli colonisation activities in Palestine (building and expanding [settlements](#)) through non-violent popular struggle and civil disobedience.

"There is a lot of cooperation between our activists and Israeli activists. We plan things on the ground together such as tours, community action including protests, increasing awareness about human rights violations, and showing Israelis what our lives are like," Issa Amro, YAS spokesman told IDN.

"When Palestinian and Israeli activists unite and cooperate against the occupation, we call it co-resistance," added Schatz.

"Many Palestinians and Israelis have become friends as our joint activities have helped us get to know each other better on an intimate basis. Palestinians are also given hope when they see that there are Israelis who care," Amro explained.

Ir Amim is another Israeli peace organisation that works with Palestinians. It is a non-profit organisation founded in 2004 that focuses on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Jerusalem.

Ir Imim established the Jerusalem Policy Forum with the Palestinian NGO, the Peace and Democracy Forum.

The group provides information to the Israeli parliament and Jerusalem Municipality on actions which they believe undermine Jerusalem's stability, impede equality or threaten future peace negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians.

It seeks to ensure the dignity and welfare of all its residents and safeguard their holy places, as well as their historical and cultural heritages. >>



Foreigners and Israelis on a tour with Ir Amim learn about life in East Jerusalem under occupation. Credit: Mel Frykberg

Ir Amim's public outreach is primarily aimed at the Israeli public, with the goal of re-orienting the public discourse on the issue of Jerusalem.

The group encourages the public to analyse events on the ground and their consequences for Israel. This is done through study tours, media work, briefings, house meetings, and educational programmes.

Swedish tourist Amie Karlsson went on one of Ir Amim's tours of East Jerusalem. "I wasn't aware of how disadvantaged East Jerusalem was compared to West Jerusalem," Karlsson told IDN.

"Ir Amim informed us that East Jerusalem gets only a fraction of the municipal budget that Jewish West Jerusalem gets. It was obvious how neglected the eastern sector of the city was with garbage everywhere, a shortage of street lights and no street signs. However, the Jewish settlements inside East Jerusalem were well tended and cared for," said Karlsson.

Despite the positive experiences of Israelis and Palestinians working together for peace, Schatz, and other Israeli activists have paid a personal price for their activism and commitment to human rights.

"I've received death threats and been called a traitor by former colleagues. It is possible to love Israel and hate the occupation because it is wrong," said Schatz, adding that the threats and insults were a price he was willing to pay. [IDN-InDepthNews – March 11, 2015]

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Publisher: Global Cooperation Council

- umbrella organisation of IPS-Inter Press Service Deutschland -

SGI-IPS Project Director: Katsuhiko Asagiri | President IPS Japan

Global Project Editor: Ramesh Jaura



A View of SGI-IPS Forum on Global Citizenship – November 18, 2014 – New York

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