

High-Level Symposium on Coastal Resilience Brief Summary of Discussion

The First Lady of Japan, **Her Excellency Madame Akie Abe** gave the keynote address at the High-Level Symposium on Coastal Resilience, on Thursday, September 25th at the Ford Foundation. This special event, held in the margins of the 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, was hosted by R3ADY Asia-Pacific in collaboration with the US-Japan Council and the Global Partnerships Forum. R3ADY Asia-Pacific (formerly APDR3, the Asia Pacific Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience Network) was launched by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in 2011 at the APEC Summit in Honolulu. Its mission is to reduce the risk of natural disasters and build resilient communities and economies through strategic and innovative partnerships.

The Symposium brought together international experts on coastal resilience, who shared their experiences and provided valuable new insights and ideas on coastal protection, including strategies to mitigate the dangerous effects of natural disasters, in terms of both economic and human cost.

R3ADY Asia-Pacific, the Global Partnerships Forum, the U.S.-Japan Council and the Ford Foundation were honored to have Her Excellency Madam Akie Abe, First Lady of Japan, share her views about the challenges faced by coastal communities, especially in Japan.

Mr. Dan Zarrilli, Director of NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio's Office of Recovery and Resilience, provided New York City's context and his leadership role in implementing *A Stronger, More Resilient New York*. He explained the City's efforts to improve resiliency by strengthening coastal protections, upgrading buildings, improving infrastructure, and making neighborhoods safer and more vibrant, especially following Hurricane Sandy. Mr. Zarrilli also serves as the Acting Director of the Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability.

Ms. Irene Hirano Inouye, President of the U.S.-Japan Council, and Chair of R3ADY Asia-Pacific Advisory Council, in her welcoming remarks, and introducing Madame Abe, focused on her goal of building strong people-to-people connections in order to form partnerships that will lead to innovative solutions.

Madame Abe elegantly explained her special connection to the sea and land, and the need for harmony with nature - "With the natural disaster that happened in Japan, something that can happen only every 1,000 years, and with that memory still so graphic and vivid among us, it is not such an easy job for our democracy to decide what we should build to protect our children and grandchildren's generation. As I see it, seawalls come with a number of serious problems. A tall seawall may make you feel safer, which is vitally important, especially for the people who have experienced insecurity or such an unspeakable disaster, yet on the other hand, there are some who say we must also be able to see the surface of the sea all the time so you can learn to recognize any changes, and that, you can only develop such sense by looking at the sea. Ironically, seawalls will make the sea invisible and its citizens rather careless."

The Symposium benefitted from the presence of a number of international leaders, including **H.E. Dr. Dipu Moni**, Chairperson of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Relations,

and former Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, who emphasized both the progress made by her nation and the rest of the world, and at the same time recognized that much still needs to be done to ensure the world's coastal population is protected.

H.E. Mr. Stuart Beck, Ambassador for Oceans and Seas for the Republic of Palau, commented on the degradation and deterioration of the world's oceans, pointing out that 90% of the fish mass, which existed in 1900, is no longer in existence.

Mr. Gary Fowlie, Director of the International Telecommunication Union's New York Office, emphasized the power of mobile technology, which can be instrumental in not only increasing information dissemination, but also as a concrete method of saving lives.

Mr. Nikhil Chandavarkar, Chief of Communication and Outreach for the Division of Sustainable Development at the United Nations, briefed participants about the excellent progress made at the SIDS Conference in Samoa in early September, highlighting that more than 400 partnerships were launched.

The High-Level Symposium was also honored to have **Ms. Margareta Wahlström**, Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, who gave a Special Address on the UN's leadership role in addressing disaster challenges in a sustainable manner. She mentioned the valuable inter-governmental dialogues, led by her office, the United Nations Office for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), which will inform the process for the World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR) that will take place in Sendai, Japan in March 2015. Ms. Wahlström emphasized the need to for innovative collaboration, and congratulated R3ADY Asia-Pacific for supporting the UN's efforts.

Sharing his insights on the private sector's contribution to disaster risk reduction, **Mr. Georg Kell**, Executive Director of the UN Global Compact, stated that, "There is also some good news in the making: more and more companies, thanks also to the financial crisis, are realizing that long term value and safeguarding creation depends increasingly on environmental stewardship, and here coastal areas are key. There are investor groups coming forward now that convincingly make the case, 'look if you don't integrate in your planning today what the disaster tomorrow could be, you are missing something important.' And that thinking is slowly, but quite impressively growing."

The Symposium was honored to have a number of officials from the U.S. Government and representatives from civil society and the private sector, who shared their perspective on the critical need to address coastal resilience.

Mr. Timothy W. Manning, Deputy Administrator for Protection and National Preparedness at the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), drew on his vast experience, including following Super Storm Sandy, to highlight several initiatives that will serve to lessen the tragic impact of future natural disasters.

Mr. Luigi Piantadosi, Vice President of International Operations for Finmeccanica, stressed the capability of satellites to help with disaster management and mitigation, by breaking through the often-obscuring cloud cover.

Mr. Mark Tercek, President of The Nature Conservancy, highlighted the benefits of green infrastructure such as mangroves and oyster reefs, which last longer than conventional seawalls and are effectively appreciating assets, to minimize the damage of storms, specifically citing Hurricane Katrina.

Dr. Holly A. Bamford, Assistant Administrator of the National Ocean Service at the National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration (NOAA), reinforced this point by citing the critical role that large and dense mangrove tree fields played during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, acting as a natural barrier for parts of the coast, and also catching large debris and slowing down seawater.

The panel was elegantly moderated by **Ms. Jennifer Field**, Director of Social Impact at GLG, the largest peer-to-peer learning platform, who stressed the importance of a multi-sector approach to addressing coastal resilience.

Mr. Parker Liataud, Fellow at the Yale Climate & Energy Institute and Polar Explorer, contributed enlightening remarks that were captured on video.

The event was the brainchild of **Ms. Jainey K. Bavishi**, Executive Director of R3ADY Asia-Pacific, and would not have been possible without her passion and dedication. She thanked all of the participants for their role in this important conversation, and looked forward to building on the momentum of the Symposium.

Other VIP attendees included: **H.E. Xavier Prens, Minister Plenipotentiary of Curacao**, and **Ms. Bahia Tahzib-Lie**, Special Envoy for UN Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

We are very grateful to **Mr. Gerard Mc Keon** and his team at Black Tie Magazine for the media outreach support for the High-Level Symposium.