

AFRICAN UNION

الاتحاد الأفريقي



UNION AFRICAINE

UNIÃO AFRICANA

Please check against delivery

STATEMENT BY

**H.E. MS. AMIRA ELFADIL
COMMISSIONER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

**ON THE OCCASION OF INTERNATIONAL DAY
FOR DISASTER REDUCTION (IDDR)
COMMEMORATION**

**13 OCTOBER 2017
OLD PLENARY HALL, AUC HEADQUARTERS
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA**

Honourable Minsters here present

**Your Excellencies, Permanent Representatives
of African Union Member States and members
of the diplomatic core**

**Representatives of International, Regional and
National organizations here present**

Distinguished Guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

All protocol observed;

First and foremost, allow me to welcome you all to this important occasion which marks yet another day to commemorate the International Day for Disaster Reduction. This day is another reminder for Africa of the urgent need to implement aggressive disaster risk reduction initiatives in order to protect its citizens from ever-evolving vulnerabilities and exposures to multiple hazards. The African Union Commission (AUC) is happy for hosting this special event, at its Headquarters this year.

The AUC commends the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia for establishing the National Disaster and Risk Management Committee in 2015. It was a positive step towards the commitment to manage and reduce the impact of disasters on the social and economic growth of the country. The AUC is glad to see such progress, which is a milestone towards implementation of the Africa Programme of Action for the implementation of the Sendai Framework 2015-2030. As the Commission, we would be happy to render the support the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic may need.

However, risk reduction should not end with establishment of policies and structures alone; they must work to yield results that reduce the number of people affected by the natural and human induced hazards. In Africa, we have an abundance of policies and decisions yet we continue to remain the most vulnerable continent to hazards. This commemoration comes as yet another wake up call to the African governments and all stakeholders to take action that will see those policies being implemented.

The Africa Programme of Action for the implementation of Sendai framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015-2030), which was adopted by the AU in January 2017 has key targets that countries should be pursuing, if we are to see reduction in the negative impact of natural and human induced hazards. This framework provides hope that one day soon, we shall overcome such calamities through its implementation.

This year the focus of the IDDR is on the second target of the Sendai Framework, which **is prevention, protection and “reducing the number of people affected by disasters”** with specific focus on the family home.

The slogan for this year, which is ‘Home Safe Home’ has sadly come too late for over 1000 Sierra Leonean citizens who perished in deadly mudslide and families of the DR Congo Village which was wiped out by a mudslide just 2 months ago, leaving only 5 of 75 houses standing. “Home Safe Home” may be a far cry to those 280 children from that village who lost their homes and families while at school.

The Chairperson of the Commission released a statement and authorized a token donation of USD 100,000 which was delivered by H.E. Mrs. Amira Elfadil, Commissioner for Social Affairs, this amount to the President of Sierra Leone to show solidarity to the Government and People of Sierra Leone,. In addition to that, two Epidemiologists have been deployed for one month to give their assistance.

Closer to home, it is a far cry to the families whose shacks were destroyed by a mudslide in March this

the IDDR day, let this not be just another celebration where people gather but a solemn reminder of the grim realities in Africa in general and Ethiopia in particular. Talks and gatherings will not keep hazards at bay. However, 'foresight and action' should be the philosophy if we are to become resilient to natural hazards. "Hope for the best and plan for the worst". We should start taking this kind of philosophy seriously as African communities, especially with climate change, which is only expected to worsen the already grim picture.

Your Excellencies Ladies and Gentlemen

While infrastructural development is every African country's dream, there is need for us to look at the potential impact of rapid urban growth, which may place too much pressure on already limited resources and thus elevate the risks associated with hazards. Urban sprawl which is not well managed and planned has potential to force poor people or informal settlements into uninhabitable lands. Informal and illegal as these may be, they are homes to human beings. It is this human consideration that must push us all: the government, development partners, regional and international agencies, as well as communities to action that finds solutions to preventing disasters like the Addis Ababa mudslide of March 2017.

DRR is a cross-cutting element which touches all sectors. The AUC establishes DRR structure and policies in the Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture to guide Africa's vision on DRR in close collaboration with the AUC's Departments of Political Affairs, Social Affairs and Peace and Security. These departments are working together to ensure integration of DRR into sectorial and development policies. I call upon our African governments and stakeholders to take further steps in integrating DRR in their different sectors.

Since this year's theme is "home safe home", I would like to strongly encourage the involvement of urban and regional planners, the health sector, and all other conceivable stakeholders to work together and develop plans that are compliant with the environmental realities of our continent, and thus start building homes that will be resilient to the various hazards we encounter.

Let me conclude by quoting an American Scientist who said, "Earthquakes don't kill but buildings do". He said this during his CNN interviews 3 weeks ago regarding the recent Mexico's Earthquake, which killed over 200 people.

Indeed buildings kill hence the need to revisit the way we do business given the changing climate and the realities of our environmental capacity.

I urge all our governments across the continent to urgently take into account the need to build resilient infrastructures through proper planning and compliance to the building codes. **That way we shall have 'Home Safe Home', and thus reduce the number of people affected by disasters'.**

I wish you a thoughtful day. May you continue to ponder over these issues even beyond this IDDR event.

Thank you

Shukurun

Obrigado

Merci

Asante