

# International Working Group Meeting Notes

Subcommittee on Disaster Reduction

12 August 2004, 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., National Science Foundation

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**Co-Chairs:** Larry Roeder (State/IO), Larry Weber (NSF), Fernando Echavarria, (State/OES)

## Members Present:

1. Dennis Wenger, NSF
2. Dori Akerman, SDR Secretariat (GRS Solutions)
3. Fernando Echavarria, State/OES/SAT
4. Gene Whitney, OSTP
5. John Gaynor, NOAA/USWRP
6. Katy Vincent, NOAA/NESDIS
7. Larry W. Roeder, Jr. State/IO/SGA
8. Larry Weber, NSF
9. Pai-Yei Whung, NOAA
10. Sheila Duwadi, DOT/Federal Highway Administration

## 1. Report on Recent Briefing by Dan Dubno, CBS News

1. Media and government roles in weather and evacuation alerts were discussed in detail, though members agreed that governments have a primary responsibility for evacuation alerts. However, members also agreed that defining “appropriate” media comments in a high-risk period is very difficult, especially because media often have access to private sector sensors, and cell phones, cable television and the Internet now provide nearly instantaneous access to information. Dennis Wenger suggested that additional research in this area is needed, and all agreed that the topic should be reviewed within the context of the upcoming World Conference on Disaster Reduction. The related question of liability also must be addressed. The roles of the media and government in weather and evacuation alerts will be discussed further at the 9 September International Working Group (IWG) meeting.

2. The Subcommittee on Disaster Reduction (SDR) will sponsor a media seminar this fall for interested stakeholders in Federal agencies and the media to discuss information sharing before, during, and after disasters. The seminar will be hosted by Gene Whitney and will feature Dan Dubno as a key presenter. Important media representatives (including representatives from the Weather Channel) and representatives from value-added firms also will be invited. This may be an appropriate forum for a discussion of the role of media in reporting alerts, perhaps with the International Working Group focusing on international aspects of the question, and SDR looking into the domestic aspects.
3. Mr. Dubno's website (<http://www.cbsnews.com/digitaldan/disaster/disasters.shtml>) was discussed and lauded for the excellent links to government and private sector disaster reduction-related sites. Mr. Dubno wishes to transfer site management and maintenance to a responsible organization with a disaster reduction interest and is interested in the SDR, the United Nations, or a major search engine like Google. Mr. Roeder suggested merging the site with the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) site, noting the ISDR's interest in forming a prevention website similar to ReliefWeb (<http://www./reliefweb.int>). Mr. Roeder has a concept paper from the ISDR Secretariat Director describing website development opportunities that he will share with IWG members. After receiving IWG member comments, he will send suggestions to the ISDR Secretariat via the U.S Mission in Geneva.

## **2. Report on the World Conference on Disaster Reduction Planning Meeting at the U.S. Department of State with Ambassadors and Senior Diplomats from 18 Embassies.**

Mr. Roeder provided a report on the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) planning meeting (28 July) at the U.S. Department of State which included ambassadors and senior diplomats from eighteen embassies. The group met informally, and made no inter-governmental decisions. However, there seemed to be general agreement on several points. See details of the discussion in Tab A.

The Department of State will cable embassies and ask them to promote the WCDR. The SDR Secretariat will upload the science and technology topic recommendations to the SDR website for easy reference.

## **3. Administrative Details and Deadlines to Prepare for the Second Preparatory Committee and the WCDR.**

Mr. Roeder briefed the group on the upcoming deadlines related to the World Conference:

- All agencies are asked to nominate officers to the ISDR National Platform, which will meet on 30 September at the Department of State. Send nominations to Larry Roeder at State/IO/SHA at [roederla@state.gov](mailto:roederla@state.gov)
- Agencies wishing to send officers to the 11-12 October Preparatory Committee meeting in Geneva in October need to inform Larry Roeder in State/IO/SHA by 8 September 2004 in order to provide enough time for clearances to be processed.

Mr. Roeder's email is [roederla@state.gov](mailto:roederla@state.gov). The list of Delegates will be announced at the 30 September National Platform Meeting.

- Agencies wishing to recommend delegates/observers to the 18-22 January 2005 WCDR need to inform Larry Roeder by 16 November 2004 so that there is enough time to process clearances.

#### **4. National Report to WCDR**

The draft U.S. National Report to the WCDR is a combination of two documents: 1) the July 2003 interim report entitled, "Reducing Disaster Vulnerability through Science and Technology" and 2) a summary statement on U.S. Government policy in risk reduction authored by Mr. Roeder. Committee members interested in commenting on the draft summary statement must do so by the opening of business on September 2<sup>nd</sup>. Mr. Roeder will update the statement, as appropriate, and present it in the 9 September SDR meeting and the 30 September ISDR National Platform meeting. Mr. Roeder will forward a revised draft of the summary statement to the SDR Secretariat by 7 September so that it can be distributed to SDR members in advance of the 9 September meeting.

#### **5. WCDR Outcomes Document**

The 31 May draft of the WCDR outcomes document was distributed and briefly discussed. All agencies must send edits to Mr. Roeder by close of business on 16 September so that the document can be updated in time for the 30 September National Platform meeting.

#### **6. U.S. Government Science and Technology Recommendations for the WCDR**

U.S. Government science and technology recommendations for the WCDR were discussed throughout the meeting and the listed topics will be the subject of discussion in the 9 September and 16 September IWG meetings. The intention of the September IWG meetings is to decide how the topic will be administratively handled in WCDR - whether we want a specific agenda item for a topic or whether merging topics is appropriate.

Agencies wishing to make proposals to organize/chair a parallel session in WCDR are asked to develop their proposals for State/IO clearance ASAP. All proposals should be sent to the WCDR Secretariat (<http://www.unisdr.org/eng/wcdr/format/thematic.htm>) by the 31 August the deadline; late proposals are possible.

A late-breaking report by the US Mission just prior to the IWG meeting indicated that governments initiating sessions might have to pay for translation and other costs normally borne by the conference secretariat. This was unacceptable to the member agencies and seemed to run counter to assurances by ISDR received in the informal New York meetings. Mr. Roeder was asked to research the costs associated with organizing or chairing a thematic parallel session, especially for translation services. He also was asked to research the peer review process to be used for selecting papers for presentation. Mr. Roeder posed the questions to the U.S. Mission and will relay the answers to the IWG just as soon as they are available.

## **Tab A: Report on the US Department of State Meeting with Embassy Representatives**

- i. Japan and ISDR have done a real service to the risk reduction community by proposing the WCDR.
- ii. All nations should attend, sending professionals from government, academia, industry and the NGO communities.
- iii. WCDR should not create new structures, but instead enhance what already exists.
- iv. The outcomes document recommendations should be voluntary, not mandatory.
- v. Risk reduction starts at home with local governments.
- vi. WCDR recommendations need to take into account varying cultures and national legal structures.
- vii. The world needs to enhance early warning and the sharing of disaster technologies.
- viii. WCDR recommendations need to be practical and cost-effective, and with a minimum of national reporting.
- ix. General practical guidelines are more important than specific quantifiable goals.
- x. A global commitment to risk reduction at all levels must be made by all nations.
- xi. Participating nations should try to help developing nations attend. To that end, the United States indicated that, pending congressional approval, it would contribute \$200,000 to the conference fund for both preparatory committee and conference efforts by the UN and developing nations. The U.S. hopes other nations might do the same.
- xii. Mutual cooperation lowers casualties and losses, hence the need for communication between national ISDR platforms. Participating embassies will seek to discover who their ISDR leads are in capitals. The United States proposed using those contacts and interested officials in embassies as an informal “contact group” to share ideas and seek common understanding.
- xiii. The United States also announced a variety of outreach initiatives as potential models for other nations, and it was agreed that the U.S. will keep the contact group informed.
- xiv. The United States also proposed a number of social and hard science topics for consideration at the WCDR.
- xv. One of the issues discussed at length at the end of the meeting was the contacts group the U.S. wishes to establish. The U.S. assumes many nations already do this as a way of linking national ISDR platform committees. The U.S. hope is to stimulate discussion between the U.S. national platform and others so that everyone can share ideas. This will avoid confusion at the Preparatory Committee Meeting in Geneva and hopefully will help everyone with planning post-Kobe. In other words, it is long term approach. If nations do not have such committee, the U.S. proposed contacting the officer(s) in their capitals that follow the conference and ISDR, as well as appropriate officers in local embassies that have an interest in this topic.
- xvi. Some of the discussions going on to advance the conference take place through regional Bureaus set up in Geneva; but it is impossible for most nations to send experts to those discussions. Though some experts from nearby nations do attend – joined by UN experts - the dialogue is mostly between diplomats in UN missions. The Bureau mechanism is essential and it must be supported; but it is not enough.

Direct contact between national platforms also is important and facilitates collaboration with each other to identify issues and share substance. In other words, the contacts group idea supplements the Bureau process, which only prepares for the Conference, and maintains an essential permanent contact list after the Conference.

- xvii. The U.S. also wishes to invite experts from some of the other platforms to Washington from time-to-time to share ideas face-to-face. The Director of the ISDR Secretariat already has made such a visit, as has the Director of the Advisory Unit to the Secretary General of OECD, who is managing an important risk identification study. Mr. Roeder also traveled to London and Paris last year to meet with some of our British and French colleagues.
- xviii. During the meeting, the representative of Mexico informed the group that the Mexico lead is General Director Erendira Paz-Campos, General Directorate for the United Nations System of the Secretariat of Foreign Relations, Phone: 011-52-55-91-57-43-17, e-mail [dgsnunidas@sre.gob.mx](mailto:dgsnunidas@sre.gob.mx).
- xix. After the meeting, Mr. Roeder had a long discussion on the potential ISDR prevention website with the Swiss Embassy representatives, and they agreed that discussion of the website could be of assistance to the ISDR and will be a useful agenda item for the contact group.