

February 5 to 8, 2007, in Santo Domingo, Risk Management Enables Development

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Thousands of people visited the 26 informative stands at the university library

Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the European Community.

Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic (NEWS from the United Nations).- Representatives from numerous countries and institutions, witnesses of countless natural disasters in the Caribbean, met once again in early February 2007 to discuss the necessity of incorporating risk management into development activities.

A second sub-regional "Knowledge Transfer Fair" was held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the European Community.

The Fair gathered together some 270 delegates from several Caribbean countries- including from Central America-, European countries, and national and international institutions to exchange experiences on the advantages of bringing about economic, social and human development on a solid base that includes risk management in a region subject to natural catastrophes of all kinds.

The first "Fair," held at the end of last year in Barbados, for the small islands that make up the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) and other English-speaking nations in the region, was a success that led to a new understanding of how best to tackle a problem that for the Caribbean region is a matter of life or death.

With support from the European Community, the UNDP has organized these fairs and other activities aimed at raising awareness of need to incorporate risk management into development planning.

The regional office of the UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery ([UNDP/BCPR](#)), based in Panama and managed by advisor Angeles Arenas, have done an outstanding job in promoting risk management. TRANSFER CARIBE, a project supervised by Arenas and directed by Peruvian architect Linda Zilbert-, has also stood out in this area and sponsored the Fairs with funds provided by the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO).



The official inauguration. From left: Ángeles Arenas, Regional Advisor for UNDP/BCPR office; and Niky Fabiancic, UN Resident Coordinator /UNDP Resident Representative for the Dominican Republic

This office also oversees several regional programmes, including the Caribbean Risk Management Initiative (CRMI), managed directly by Canadian Karen Bernard, who presented case studies at both Fairs. These studies were undertaken in diverse regions of

the Caribbean, where timely risk management helped lower the occurrence of catastrophes and their painful outcomes. The [CRMI](#) is based at the UNDP offices in Cuba and in Barbados.

With efficient organization by the UNDP in the Dominican Republic, the Santo Domingo Knowledge Fair took place from February 5 to 9 at the Pedro Mir Library of the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo, an institution that has enthusiastically taken part in saving lives and protecting the economic and social patrimony of the country and beyond. Participating UN organizations included the UNDP, the Pan-American and World Health Organizations (PAHO/WHO), the Humanitarian Aid Office, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), which held a seminar in the framework of the fair.

The official opening took place on February 5 at the main auditorium of the library with the presence of the university's Vice President, the Secretary of State for Cooperation, the head of Civil Defence, the European Union representatives for the Dominican Republic and Cuba, the United Nations Resident Coordinator /UNDP Resident Representative for the Dominican Republic and the UNDP/BCPR Regional Advisor.



Delegates at the event speaking with Dominican Republic Head of Civil Defence Major General Luis Antonio Luna Paulino- Ret. (centre). UNDP/CRMI Program Manager Karen Bernard (second from right).

Fresh on the heels of the climate change meeting held in Paris in early February with the support of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the conference in Santo Domingo gathered experts from numerous countries who confirmed the accelerated global warming of the atmosphere and the tragic consequences this could have for the planet. These include drought, torrential rainfall and flooding, melting of the polar icecaps, a rise in sea levels and countless other natural disasters.

Niky Fabianic, UN Resident Coordinator /UNDP Resident Representative for the Dominican Republic and host of the event, gave the opening presentation. Fabianic pointed out that in the last ten years, natural catastrophes have taken some 600,000 lives and affected more than 2.4 billion people, especially in developing countries, without mentioning the substantial socioeconomic costs, and pain and suffering. He added that it has been demonstrated that a dollar invested in prevention can save many dollars spent in emergency response.

Early predictions indicate that this year the Caribbean region could experience an elevated number of tropical storms, cyclones and hurricanes specifically due to atmospheric changes associated with global warming and other human activities.

The 2nd Fair featured a knowledge exchange forum with the participation of several high-level experts, public officials, representatives from international cooperation and aid organizations, scientists, academics, and policy makers. Throughout four days,

sessions were held where a wide gamut of both positive and not-so-positive experiences were shared and debated.

The gathering established a solid conceptual and practical framework for risk management and a unique opportunity to witness that countries can provide satisfactory protection to advances made in development before natural catastrophes occur.



Case study discussions provided a wealth of experiences to participants.

Ángeles Arenas, the UNDP/BCPR Regional Advisor on Risk Reduction, gave a keynote address entitled *Reducing Disaster Risks: A Challenge for Development*, on the subject of national, regional and community preparation and incorporating disaster risk reduction measures into development plans.

ECLAC official Ricardo Zapata spoke about the methodology used to calculate losses stemming from disasters; while the UNDP representative in Santo Domingo, Indhira de Jesús, presented a paper on *Human Development and Risk Management in the Dominican Republic*.

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) -an organization comprised of 16 English-speaking Caribbean nations- provided a presentation on their experience with their disaster preparation project administered by the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (CDERA). CDERA Coordinator Jeremy Collymore explained in detail the mechanisms established by this organisation to handle natural disasters that affect this region.



Linda Zilbert, director of the TRANSFER CARIBE Project, spoke to participants at the 2nd Fair.

With 26 stands, one of the unique features of the fair was its interactive element. The public was able to participate in rescue and disaster simulations.

One of the fundamental conclusions shared by thousands of participants was that it is much better to work towards risk reduction within development rather than face the tragic consequences of not doing so.

The Fair also supported cooperation with an area devoted to meeting and negotiating tables where the various delegations were able to express their interests and offer support in areas such as the creation of early warning systems (EWS), evacuation procedures, risk studies and physical planning.

Cooperation agreements reached at these tables will be monitored by the UNDP/BCPR as a way to assure sustainability in these efforts and the possibility replicating them in other areas.

The 2nd Fair received wide press coverage in Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Cuba and on international television and radio outlets.

The work sessions included the participation of representatives from the Association of Caribbean States (ACS); the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO); the Andean Cities Organization; the Anauco Consortium (Venezuela); the International Federation of the Red Cross; government institutions from the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Cuba; and representatives from humanitarian organizations such as CARE, OXFAM, CONCERN, Action Aid and from the Spanish, Dominican Republic and Haitian Red Cross.



Dominican Republic rescue teams demonstrate their skills during educational simulations in which the public actively participated.



The Pedro Mir Library at the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo, venue for the 2nd Knowledge Fair.

Donors included official institutions from the United States, Korea and the European Community as well as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).

Cuba, the leading country in the movement toward regional risk management integration, sent a large delegation that included representatives from the Ministry of Cooperation (MINVEC), the Institute of Meteorology (INSMET), the Institute of Physical Planning (IPF), the Guamá Risk Reduction Management Centre (based in western Cuba) and the GeoCuba.

Among the proposals presented was one to hold a 3rd Fair in Panama, with a focus on Central American countries that are also exposed to disasters stemming from both volcanic and climatic activity.

During the five workdays, the 2nd Knowledge Fair in Santo Domingo confirmed the general consensus on the unquestionable advantages of integrating risk management into economic and social development work. There can be no safe development without the kind of management that acts to protect and shield - risk management enables development.



From left: The Haitian Director of Civil Defence, Alta Jean-Baptiste, and Jean-Robert Dossaint, the Director at the Haitian Ministry of the Interior, during a working lunch.