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**Session V: Panel Debate – Role of civil society in disaster risk management**

*Community-based disaster risk management*

*Role of civil society, including business community, and social networks in crisis mapping*

**BACKGROUND**

Everywhere in the world, including the OSCE region, communities and local people are in the forefront of responding to various emergencies including man-made disasters. The reduction of risk at the local level will contribute to security and stability in the region. While prevention and preparedness for natural disasters and environmental emergencies is everybody's responsibility, civil society and non-governmental organizations have an important role to play. A number of NGOs are active in the area of preparedness for natural disasters. However, very few non-governmental organizations are engaged in matters related to such environmental emergencies as industrial and technological accidents, and preparedness in this area is generally weak. Helping local populations to improve their own abilities in disaster management by establishing local mechanisms and processes for identifying, assessing, preventing, preparing and responding to natural disasters and environmental emergencies, cannot be done without the private sector's active involvement. It is necessary to enhance dialogues with the private sector, so as to promote the integration of preparedness for emergencies at local level in corporate policies and practices.

**ISSUES**

The importance of involving local governments and communities in the design and implementation of preparedness measures is generally recognized. However, such practice is far from being universally applied, especially with regard to environmental emergencies. Many important stakeholders (such as the civil society, NGOs, private sector and professional associations) are not sufficiently involved in preparedness for emergencies, including industrial and technological accidents. People and communities have the right to know what is happening around them, and should have the right to be prepared for industrial accidents. It is necessary to spread local preparedness methodology and experience to thousands of communities, especially those living in proximity to industrial sites. Any single actor alone will never be able to cover all locations and carry out projects there. Pragmatic partnerships among principal stakeholders are fundamental. OSCE could make an important contribution in this area.

The private sector has a critical role at community level, and there are clear benefits to businesses in improving environmental emergency preparedness by applying best practices and addressing civil society's concerns. Such benefits include a better prevention and safety, fewer accidents, decreased environmental and economic losses, improved relations with communities, good image. Properly maintained industrial sites, together with well-prepared adjacent communities, contribute to cost-effective disaster risk reduction and local resilience. A constructive dialogue and partnerships between principal actors and the industries can be a powerful lever for achieving their respective missions, and contributing to stability and security in the OSCE region. Thus it is imperative to engage business sector in improving the preparedness of the communities in which they live and work. The required investment is very modest, but benefits will be significant. Basically, the entire matter is not about money but goodwill, openness and transparency.

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Efficient prevention and preparedness for various disasters at the local level will greatly contribute to security and stability of communities in OSCE participating States.

Taking into account OSCE's mandate and experience, it could serve as a forum which would bring closer together the civil society and business community, in order to reinforce their dialogue and identify opportunities for a mutually beneficial cooperation.

An important potential role of the OSCE could be to advocate among industrial companies and their associations with a view to invest into local preparedness and fully include community preparedness for natural disasters and environmental emergencies into their Corporate Social Responsibility policies and practices.

The OSCE has a great potential to gather the necessary political and financial support to facilitate the involvement of national and international non-governmental organizations in preparedness for various emergencies at the local level.

OSCE activities should complement the work of other specialized international bodies, such as UNEP, UNOCHA, UNECE and ISDR. Specifically, OSCE could play an important role in promoting among its participating States a highly efficient UNEP methodology “Awareness and Preparedness for Emergencies at Local Level” (APELL).

The OSCE, with its vast experience, could make an important contribution to better public awareness of various risks and hazards at community level, with a view to strengthening local emergency preparedness and contingency planning.

Another possible area of engagement for the OSCE could be advocating among donors (Governments, foundations, industries and others) towards investing and supporting the work of international and national NGOs for the sake of local disaster preparedness.