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OFFICE FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION • BUREAU POUR LA REDUCTION DES RISQUES DE CATASTROPHES

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Excellency,

I am writing in response to your letter of 16 November 2021 inviting the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) to provide input to the thematic review of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in 2022. Disaster risk reduction is at the core of this year's HLPF theme, including the central provision of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 to "build back better." Integrating risk reduction into the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including emerging lessons learned from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, is fundamental for a resilient, green, and equitable recovery from the crisis. A risk-informed and prevention-oriented approach to economic, climate and development policy at all levels is an imperative for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

I am pleased to inform you that the 2021 Regional Platforms for Disaster Risk Reduction, hosted by the Governments of Jamaica, Kenya, Morocco and Portugal and organized by UNDRR and intergovernmental organizations in each region, were successfully held throughout November 2021. The Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction will be held in September 2022. The Regional Platforms, organised every three years, are critical milestones towards the achievement of the SDGs by 2030 through building resilience. They are ready-made examples of the inclusive and networked multilateralism recommended by the Secretary-General in his report on "Our Common Agenda". It is with pleasure that UNDRR offers the outcomes of the Regional Platforms to promote risk-informed and prevention-oriented policy and programmes across the work of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Highlights of the Platforms' Political Declarations and other outcomes are hereby submitted as inputs to the 2022 HLPF (enclosed in Annex 2).

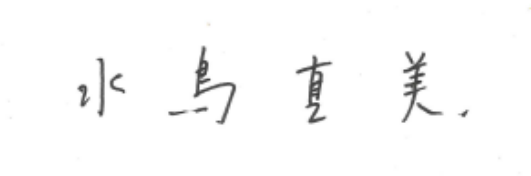
All Political Declarations and outcomes of the Regional Platforms promote a comprehensive approach to risk management that fosters policy and programmatic coherence across sustainable development, climate action, humanitarian response and recovery, and the preservation of biodiversity and ecological systems at all levels. They convey the clear message that, in order to achieve the 2030 Agenda, risk that currently exists within economic, social and environmental systems must be reduced and the creation of future risks prevented. They also point to the systemic nature of risk linked to the cascading social, economic, political and environmental impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis and other disasters. The urgency of building resilience through the integration of disaster risk reduction into socio-economic recovery and long-term development measures is clear throughout, and there is a strong message that development that is not risk-informed is not sustainable.

The Regional Platforms' declarations and outcomes offer policy guidance and practical solutions to accelerate the implementation of the Sendai Framework around issues fundamental to the transition from creating risk to building resilience, including in relation

to the SDGs under review in 2022. Related to SDG 4, there is an appreciation of the need to promote awareness and knowledge among children and youth towards a culture of disaster prevention and resilience, including by promoting and strengthening a systemic approach to school safety and integrating risk preparedness, prevention and response in school curriculums. Towards the attainment of SDG 5, gender-responsive and inclusive disaster risk reduction and the need to collect disaggregated risk data and increase women leaders' capacity and visibility in disaster risk reduction is underscored. The need to integrate ecosystem-based solutions and scale-up investments for disaster risk reduction, climate action and the 2030 Agenda is recognized as important towards the attainment of SDGs 14 and 15. Risk reduction is at the heart of SDG 17. Disaster risk reduction requires all-of-society engagement and partnership supported by capacity building for data collection and technology transfer. There is also an urgent need to increase financing for disaster risk reduction and to de-risk investments in all sectors. Annex 1 outlines additional inputs on the SDGs under review, and addresses the questions posed for consideration in your letter.

As we approach the Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework, the ECOSOC will play a critical in underlining that reducing risk and building resilience are fundamental to achieving the SDGs and necessitate transformation in environmental, social, financial and governance systems. This will reverberate across work of the ECOSOC in 2022, including the Coordination Segment, Commission on the Status of Women, Forum on Financing for Development, and the Humanitarian Affairs Segment, and culminating at the HLPF. UNDRR looks forward to working with your Office to ensure that the outcomes of the Regional Platforms will promote a risk-informed and prevention-oriented policy and programmes across the work of the ECOSOC in 2022 and beyond.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.



Mami Mizutori
Special Representative of the Secretary-General
for Disaster Risk Reduction

H.E. Collen Vixen Kelapile
President of the Economic and Social Council
New York

Annex 1: Responses to Proposed Template for Guiding Inputs

(a) Progress, experience, lessons learned, challenges and impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of SDGs 4, 5, 14, 15 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the SDGs and targets, including policy implications of their synergies and trade-offs;

SDG 4: Ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all will not be possible without the integration of disaster risk reduction across the implementation of SDG 4. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the need for a **stronger focus on school safety and educational continuity in the event of disasters.** Drivers of risk in the education sector include inter alia limited budgets for school safety actions, gender inequality, deficiencies in school infrastructure, poor access to water and sanitation, and limited access to internet connectivity and electricity. The long-term social benefits and economic returns of investing in school safety and educational continuity are high. Learning losses contribute to widening gaps in education, with long-term impacts on poverty and inequality. Knock-on effects from school closures due to disasters, such as increased malnutrition, impacts on mental health, early entrance into the workforce and child marriage, also bring long term negative human, social, and economic impacts. As the world faces ever-more complex risks and increasing frequency and intensity of climate-related disasters, the importance of this issue is set to increase towards and beyond 2030. Globally, investment must be made in education, technology, and electrification to facilitate continuity in times of disasters caused by natural and man-made hazards, as well as related environmental, technological and biological hazards and risks. Retrofitting existing and building new schools and other education facilities to become disaster resilient, including to the impacts of climate change, must be a priority under SDG 4. This should be accompanied by developing comprehensive remote learning systems for use in time of disaster. There is also a need to integrate disaster risk reduction into school curriculums and higher education to: (i) enhance understanding among the public of disaster risk and risk reduction, (ii) ensure young professionals can integrate risk reduction and resilience in their work, and (iii) build technical and research capacity for systemic risk reduction at the national level. Despite the evidence that investments in safe and resilient schools reduce disaster impacts and ensure a faster socio-economic recovery, challenges remain with access to financing for disaster risk reduction measures in schools, including retrofitting buildings. Agreements such as the Antigua and Barbuda Declaration on the Caribbean School Safety Framework,[1] adopted at the Third Ministerial Forum of the Caribbean School Safety Initiative, are important enablers for the achievement of SDG 4.

SDG 5: The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates the ways in which gender inequalities are accentuated during disasters and how gender inequality is a driver of disaster risk for women and girls. To counter this, **inclusive and gender-responsive disaster risk reduction strategies and plans, gender-responsive disaster risk reduction budgeting and risk-informed reviews of public budgets are essential. These must be supported by disaggregated data collection to understand exposure, vulnerability, and the differential impacts of disasters on women and girls**. The social impact of COVID-19 for women and girls is high, with limited social safety nets and fiscal stimulus, a higher burden of unpaid care and domestic work, and higher rates of domestic and intimate partner

[1] https://www.undrr.org/caribbean-safe-school-initiative-cssi#ab-dd

violence.[2] The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the need to address prevailing gender-based inequalities while tackling gender issues specific to disaster contexts, simultaneously. The COVID-19 recovery strategies and plans to build back better must include commitments to gender equality. Without concerted attention to reduce vulnerability and exposure to current and future crises, women and girls will be left further behind. It is therefore an imperative that gender-responsive disaster risk reduction be included with a human-rights-based approach to development.

SDG 14: Sustainable use and management of the world's ocean systems strengthens disaster and climate risk management. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on underlying planetary health and therefore disaster risk, including by increasing the amount of waste generated due to personal protective equipment, which negatively impacts the marine ecosystem. All blue economic systems are being negatively impacted by COVID-19,[3] which exacerbates the underlying vulnerability of coastal populations to disasters. The blue economy will play a crucial role in COVID-19 recovery, and **it is essential that policies and stimulus packages directed to its rehabilitation are risk-informed to prevent exacerbating exposure and vulnerability to disasters and contributing to the climate crisis**, and instead enhance biodiversity and reduce disaster and climate risk.

SDG 15: The natural environment is in a system-wide crisis and, as demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic, future risks are global with potential for cascading impacts. Habitat loss due to human activity and the wildlife trade increase the risk of diseases jumping from animals to humans. Natural resource depletion and ecosystem degradation have dramatic impacts on exposure and vulnerability to hazards of all kinds, including pandemics, with impacts on livelihoods, poverty, and food security. Environmental factors, often related to social inequalities, have had an influence on COVID-19 outcomes, exacerbating pre-existing disparities. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that **societal resilience depends on a resilient environmental support system** and as such **COVID-19 recovery plans must place nature at their core to prevent future disasters.** Moving forward, countries must consider the interactions between human and ecological systems to address underlying risk drivers and prevent future disasters by protecting and restoring nature. Regeneration of the natural environment is fundamental to preventing future disasters, and ecosystems-based approaches to disaster risk reduction and conversely integrating risk considerations into environmental action is essential.

(b) Assessment of the situation regarding the principle of "leaving no one behind" against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic and for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, within the respective areas addressed by your intergovernmental body;

Disasters, including the COVID-19 pandemic, have devastating impacts on efforts to leave no one behind. Existing social dynamics, such as discrimination, marginalization, and inequality, are further exacerbated in disasters and are themselves determinants of exposure and vulnerability to all types of hazards. The majority of disasters do not only have the largest impact on the most vulnerable in the short-term, they also erode long-term progress towards sustainable development. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to

[2] *Learning from COVID-19 to strengthen gender-responsive disaster risk reduction,* United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2021
[3] https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ditctedinf2020d2_en.pdf

disproportionate loss of livelihoods for poorer communities and a disproportionate impact on learning loss for children in lower-income families and communities. This has widened inequality within and between countries. Least-Developed Countries and Small Island Developing States have also been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic as well as the concurrent impacts of disasters and climate change. They also have limited fiscal space for emergency response and recovery from the pandemic and the impacts of other disasters which deepens their social and economic impacts and prolongs the recovery and reconstruction period. To ensure no one and no country is left behind, it is critical that building resilience and reducing disaster risk, by addressing underlying social and economic drivers of exposure and vulnerability to hazards of all kinds, be integrated into domestic policy and international support for COVID-19 recovery and rehabilitation. Member States have already called for the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction to guide COVID-19 recovery.

(c) Actions and policy recommendations in areas requiring urgent attention in relation to the implementation of the SDGs under review;

SDG 4

- **Disaster and climate-resilient classrooms** are essential for educational continuity and physical safety of students, as well as psychological safety for students who have experienced the destruction of hazards. An example of retrofitting schools is the Funafuti Classroom Building Project in Tuvalu, which reinforced the largest educational institution in Tuvalu's capital[4] to withstand earthquakes, the wind speeds of a Category 5 cyclone, soil erosion as well as installed rainwater harvesting tanks to help the school community deal with long periods of drought.[5] This has created a safer learning environment, and the school can now double as a shelter during hazard events.
- **Comprehensive remote learning systems** should be in place to ensure equal access when face-to-face schooling is disrupted, which requires action to bridge the digital divide and build the resilience of community, education, and health systems. The reconstruction of education systems after the pandemic must consider technological solutions supported by resilient energy systems where possible, alongside the strengthening of community, education, and health institutions, so that loss of education in times of disaster is minimized.
- **Incorporating disaster prevention and preparedness into school curriculums** is a step towards the inclusion of children as agents of change in their schools and communities. As outlined in UNDRR's Words into Action guidelines on Engaging children and youth in disaster risk reduction and resilience building,[6] their contributions can make a difference for more inclusive disaster risk reduction and resilience-building policies, more prepared households, and safer communities. Education on risk reduction and resilience is also essential to build a culture of risk reduction and ensure the next generation of young professionals and policy makers incorporate risk reduction and resilience in their work.
- **Financing school safety** must be a priority for safe schools and educational continuity. National budgetary preparations must take into account the integration of

[4] The institution enrolls 45% of the country's total primary school population
[5] https://www.undrr.org/news/fale-pili-australia-and-tuvalu-build-disaster-resilient-classrooms
[6] https://www.undrr.org/publication/words-action-guidelines-engaging-children-and-youth-disaster-risk-reduction-and

disaster risk reduction in budgets in the educational sector. School safety investment is a key element of economic recovery, and integrating lessons learnt during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the importance of contingency funding for hybrid learning models in times of disaster, is essential.

SDG 5

- **The rights, leadership, and perspectives of women and girls** must be fully integrated in disaster risk reduction, including in the formulation and implementation of disaster risk reduction policies and programmes across all sectors. Inclusive and gender-responsive disaster risk reduction strategies and plans are essential.
- **Collecting disaggregated data** is necessary to obtain a deeper understanding of the differential impact of disasters on people of different genders. Broadening the understanding of data relevant to disaster risk reduction is essential for inclusive policies and programmes that address the root causes of vulnerability.
- **Gender responsive budgeting and the application of a gender analysis to risk financing across sectors** is imperative to leave no one behind. Where disaster risk reduction is integrated and budgeted for across sectors, the application of a gender-lens to budgeting is an additional step towards inclusion.

SDG 14

- **Policies to stimulate the blue economy** must be informed by an understanding of unintended knock-on impacts that may affect systemic risk. For example, offshore renewable energy developments must address concerns related to marine biodiversity and therefore ocean health.
- **Healthy coastal ecosystems** must be promoted and restored to reduce risk and build resilience of coastal communities. This solution yields multiple benefits across the SDGs and reduces the exposure of populations and assets to natural hazards. UNDRR's Words into Action on Nature-based Solutions for DRR contains practical advice for a people-centered approach to scaling-up their risk-informed implementation.[7]
- **Data, science and technology** should be shared to increase understanding of ocean and atmospheric system interactions. Early warning systems for natural hazards resulting from these interactions as well as from other hazards related to the ocean such as tsunamis must be strengthened to reduce disaster risk. While advances have been made in multi-hazard early warning systems, there remains an urgent need to strengthen capacity and fill technical and human resource gaps, particularly in least developed countries and small island developing states.

SDG 15

- **Nature-based solutions can make a significant contribution to the resilience of infrastructure with co-benefits for the environmental and local communities.** Nature-based solutions bring together different dimensions of sustainable development and enhancing coherence between international frameworks and agendas. Using relevant national and local coordination mechanisms, countries can benefit from integrating disaster risk reduction in environmental management and restoration in all relevant policies and programs. This will yield co-benefits across the SDGs in addition to reducing disaster risk. UNDRR's Words into Action Guide

[7] https://www.undrr.org/publication/words-action-nature-based-solutions-disaster-risk-reduction

provides practical information on how risks can be reduced by working with nature instead of against it.[8]

- **Risk-based decision making must be represented in sectoral policies and agreements** such as in agriculture and forestry, as safeguarding species and ecosystems requires more than conservation and protection of natural habitats.
- **A sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that prevents future disasters and reduces risk requires the systematic integration of green measures throughout COVID-19 strategies and stimulus packages**, and the avoidance of environmental de-regulation. Including budget allocation for green infrastructure and grey/green blended solutions and redirecting subsidies that lead to the degradation of ecosystems to ecosystem restoration is key to scaling up finance for nature-based solutions.

(d) Policy recommendations, commitments and cooperation measures for promoting a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda;

- Ongoing recovery and rehabilitation measures from the COVID-19 pandemic must **prioritize recovery actions across the 2030 Agenda that prevent the creation of new risks and reduce existing risks, and build resilience to future disasters, including pandemics**. The Sendai Framework, including its core provision to "build back better" provides guidance relevant to a sustainable recovery from COVID-19 that addresses underlying drivers of exposure and vulnerability in a systemic manner.

(e) Key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2022 HLPF.

- We must invest in safe and resilient infrastructure for education at all levels and develop comprehensive remote learning systems so that loss of education in times of disaster is minimized. We recognize that integrating disaster prevention and preparedness into academic curriculums is a necessary step to build a culture of risk reduction and resilience and develop national technical capacity for risk reduction and resilience.

- We recognize that disasters exacerbate gender inequalities and undermine progress towards SDG 5. We recognize the need for inclusive gender-responsive disaster risk reduction strategies and plans, informed by the collection and analysis of disaggregated data and supported by appropriate financing.

- We recognize that natural resource depletion and ecosystem degradation have impacts on exposure and vulnerability to hazards of all kinds, and that action to stimulate the regeneration of ecosystems is fundamental to prevent future disasters. We call for a scaling-up of ecosystems-based approaches for disaster risk reduction and risk-informed environmental action.

- We recognize that a risk-informed development policy and investments in all sectors and at all levels is imperative to recover from COVID-19 and attain the 2030 Agenda. We commit to an all-of-government comprehensive approach to risk

[8] https://www.undrr.org/publication/words-action-nature-based-solutions-disaster-risk-reduction

management and governance informed by multi-hazard disaster risk assessments to address the complex and systemic nature of disaster risk in all sectors. We look forward to the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the midterm review of the Sendai Framework to be held in New York on 18 and 19 May 2023, and recognise that the outcomes of the mid-term review will provide valuable input on the extent to which development policy and investments are risk-informed to inform other global stock takes in 2023, including the SDG Summit, and identify the 2023 ECOSOC HLPF as an important opportunity to discuss the findings and outcomes of the Sendai Framework midterm review in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

- We underscore the importance of investing in prevention and risk reduction, including applying a risk-lens across sectoral budgeting in addition to dedicated financing for disaster risk reduction. We call for increased investment in quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure and disaster risk data, and the development of innovative approaches to financing for disaster risk reduction in accordance with national circumstances, such as risk and resilience bonds, principles for resilient infrastructure, tracking financing for risk reduction in all sectors, and incorporating disaster risk within taxonomies for sustainable and green investments.