Opening Statement

by

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"Components of successful
risk management"

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Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Distinguished guests,

I would also like to welcome you all to Switzerland, to Montreux, and to the field visits in the Canton of Valais that the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation has arranged for you tomorrow, in cooperation with the authorities of the Canton and the Federal Office for the Environment. The examples you will be shown tomorrow will focus on natural and environmental risks in a mountainous region.

For the 22nd OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum, the Swiss OSCE Chairmanship intends to link this official meeting with practical observations in the field, while bringing people together to share their knowledge and expertise. I very much hope that you will enjoy the field visits that we have organised!

My initial thoughts go to the individuals, families and communities that were severely affected by the floods in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and their neighbouring countries. Switzerland has offered financial contributions and assistance to the governments of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia, and is continuing to closely monitor the situation.

Knowing your risks is at the heart of disaster risk management, be it in a mountainous area or anywhere else. It is not only important to correctly assess risks, but also to understand how risks are interconnected. A clear picture of the risk landscape is fundamental for preventing new risks as well as reducing and transferring existing risks. It will be of the utmost importance for the flood affected areas

in south-eastern Europe to delve deep into disaster analyses in order to draw lessons for the future – in terms of understanding risks, planning land use, making/implementing laws and taking constructional measures. The field visit in the floodplain of the river Rhone will show how these different types of measures are combined. Since resources for risk reduction activities are limited, prioritising public policy measures is key.

Managing disaster risks is not static. Hazards, vulnerability and risk exposure change over time, particularly in the context of climate change. Tomorrow, the field visit along the Great St Bernard route will show how risk reduction measures have to be adapted to the consequences of climate change.

Achieving resilience of nations and communities is not only a concept, but a long-term programme and investment. Resilience embraces at the same time the ability of people, communities and systems to withstand, adapt and recover from <u>disasters</u> – such as floods, storms and earthquakes – as well as to prevent, withstand, adapt and recover from <u>wars, conflicts and crises</u>. It is our very obligation to secure people from violent attacks *and* to reduce people's vulnerability and exposure to disasters.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to briefly elaborate three components of successful risk management that are also relevant for the OSCE:

<u>First</u>, pursuing a **comprehensive risk management approach, including disaster risks,** that leads to resilience, is in accordance with the multi- and cross-dimensional nature of the OSCE. Disaster risk management is therefore relevant for the OSCE's overall safety and security agenda. Not only because natural disasters may endanger people's lives and livelihoods, cause economic losses, or have a devastating impact on critical infrastructure, but also because cooperation in reducing disaster risks may contribute to clearly defining responsibilities and building confidence between nations, communities and people that are potentially at risk.

<u>Second</u> – and as mentioned before – **prevention is better than cure.** This is valid for crises, conflicts and disasters. However, the shift from response to a combination of preventive and preparedness measures faces many challenges. Prevention is politically not attractive: It is easier to raise public resources for assistance when a disaster strikes than for preventive measures before a possible emergency situation occurs. And prevention is complex, involving many policy sectors, stakeholders at different governmental levels, and also non-governmental actors.

At the global level, Switzerland is very engaged in disaster risk reduction. This year, we will host the two inter-governmental preparatory committee meetings in Geneva to work out a new international agreement on disaster risk reduction to replace the existing Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA). Governments around the world should agree on this new framework at the 3rd World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR), scheduled for March 2015 in Sendai, Japan. We realise how important it is to involve all the relevant actors in this process, be it regional

organisations such as the OSCE, local governments, communities or the private sector.

Finally, the time has come for OSCE participating States to show **political leadership and commitment** for the Sendai process. In addition, we all need to advocate that the post-2015 agenda, which will define the sustainable development goals for the next generation, fully integrates the spirit and the action of disaster risk reduction. In this regard, the ties between Geneva, New York and also Vienna must be strengthened, especially as we move ahead with preparations for new global frameworks.

Dear participants,

I am looking forward to accompanying you during the two coming days, to learn from *your* experience in the field of disaster prevention and to take a common step towards the risk-informed, sustainable development of our societies in the OSCE area. We bear a special responsibility because OSCE participating States are among the key donors for humanitarian aid and development cooperation, and the largest providers of military and civil defence assets (MCDA) for disaster relief.

Thank you for your attention.