



## **Message to the Natural Disaster Youth Summit Process**

**From**

**Badaoui Rouhban**

**Chief, Section for Disaster Reduction, UNESCO, Paris**

First of all, let me say how pleased and honoured I am to address the process of the Natural Disaster Youth Summit. Some of you brave youngsters have already lived through earthquakes, floods, violent storms and other ravages of nature. And all of you live in places that are vulnerable. I would like to tell you how touched I am by the paintings and photos I have seen describing the tragedies in Iran and Japan, and how very moved I am by the messages of condolence I have read by children to victims of disasters and the acts of commemoration, like the planting of trees at Haruichiban-no-oka. What you youngsters have done, and are doing, is precious and valuable and on behalf of UNESCO, I would like to offer you a heartfelt thank you.

As children of the 21st century, no matter where you are and how different you may be, you have at least one thing in common: you all embody our hope for the future. To quote the Director-General of UNESCO, Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, it is our hope that you will carry on doing what the preceding generations (your parents, grandparents and other ancestors) have done well; more than this, we hope that you will do even better, far better, than us.

The United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction is an opportunity to once again focus the attention of the international community on the vital and ever-topical question of natural disasters. Despite the efforts of local communities, governments and international organizations, natural disasters continue to exact a terrible toll worldwide in human, economic and environmental terms.

Many of you must have seen the devastation of the recent Niigata Earthquake. People there are living in temporary shelters, and children are going to schools from their temporary shelters. I had a chance to see the TV coverage on Niigata earthquake, and the most impressive thing was the smiling face of the children. When the local government arranged a helicopter trip to see their hometown from the air, many of the children were full of tears, but they came back with the determination to overcome the disaster, and to return to their hometown with combined efforts of their families and communities.

Recent months have also witnessed several such disasters: floods and storms have ravaged Haïti, Jamaica and other countries of the Caribbean as well as parts of Latin America, India, Bangladesh and China; powerful earthquakes have struck Algeria, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Morocco; locusts and drought have continued to plague Africa; and wildfires have wrought devastation in several parts of Europe. Moreover, it is the poor and disadvantaged who tend to suffer the most as a consequence of these natural calamities.

But I would like to express my optimism about the future. In this age of rapidly evolving forms of communication, the children of today have greater access to more knowledge, and greater possibilities for inter-cultural exchange, than ever before. You young people, who are learning to live with risk today will help to diminish, perhaps, in some cases, even to abolish, the risks of tomorrow.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "B. Rouhban".