

Dear Minister,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to warmly thank you, also on behalf of Commissioner Lenarcic, for your kind invitation to take part in this important meeting on 'Building More Inclusive Societies through Better Disaster Risk Management'.

Let me say a few words on how the European Commission contributes to this objective. The EU Civil Protection Mechanism, which recently celebrated **its 20-year anniversary**, is the key element in our disaster management architecture.

This Mechanism provides support to EU Member States and six participating States throughout the whole disaster risk management (prevention, preparedness and response) for all kinds of hazards.

It not only shows the added value of an efficient emergency management coordination at European level, but also it provides **tangible European solidarity** – inside and outside Europe.

The experience of the past years have demonstrated its added value, being at the frontline of the Covid-19 pandemic and other major disasters.

This year, we took a decisive step to further strengthen the Mechanism.

One of its key new features: **Disaster Resilience Goals** and **scenario-planning**.

These are major developments to improve the understanding of disaster risk in the EU. Through this planning and reflection process with Member States, we are able to better anticipate trends, emerging risks and how these are likely to affect the disaster risk landscape.

This will complement the efforts to develop a safety net of disaster response capacities at the EU level, known as the **rescEU**. rescEU is designed to support Member States when national capacities are overwhelmed.

Disasters know no borders. And unfortunately, the scale, frequency and intensity of disasters is increasing due to new and climate-related risks. The forest fires and floods of this year are a reminder and suggest a “new normal” to be prepared for.

For this, agreements like EUR-OPA are very relevant, inviting us to think beyond national borders, and to adopt a cross-border and cross-sectoral approach.

Under the UCPM, solidarity is also encouraged beyond the EU. Not only through the global reach on disaster response, but also through the support to third countries in the area of prevention and preparedness.

Through regional initiatives in the Western Balkans, the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood, we scale up capacity building efforts and strengthen regional resilience.

For instance, the Eastern Partnership Flagship programme on prevention, preparedness and response to disasters promotes **inclusion, gender equality and environmental considerations** in disaster risk management planning both at national and regional level.

In the rapidly changing and ever complex risk landscape we are facing, the challenge is to understand how to make our societies more resilient and inclusive, and better prepared when disaster strikes. Let me highlight just two aspects to reinforce:

- a) As pointed out by a World Bank study, the benefits of investing in green and resilient infrastructure almost always exceed their costs, and bring social and economic opportunities even if a disaster *does not occur*. They also reduce the financial burden of countries when disasters *do occur*.
- b) It is also clear that the impact of disasters is not the same for everyone, in particular to people with disabilities and vulnerable groups. We are committed to build a more inclusive society working towards scaling up disability assistance and reinforcing the capability of assisting equally everyone in disasters.

Better disaster management is a collective responsibility, at all levels, at all times. I am confident that the discussions of this meeting will contribute to this goal.

Thank you.