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Item 6 of the provisional agenda

**Standards and normative mechanisms for sustainable  
development and disaster risk reduction<sup>1</sup>****Note by the Secretariat***Summary*

The enclosed document is a summary of the paper (available at: <http://goo.gl/ujKy66>) produced by the UNECE secretariat as background for the United Nations publication “Global Assessment Report” (GAR) which will be issued in early 2015 to support the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR) to be held in Sendai, Japan from 16 to 18 March 2015.

This document explains why voluntary standards have a key role to play in the prevention and management of disaster risks, and in situations of disruption and crises.

It aims at bringing standards into the toolbox of disaster risk reduction, including both by encouraging their use by business and by enhancing their role in legislation and regulatory practice.

*Action items*

Having regard to the enclosed study which concludes with recommendations for actions that authorities can undertake to further the implementation of standards in the context of DRR, it is suggested that a discussion is initiated by the Working Party on the direction of further activities by the Secretariat and the Bureau in support of disaster risk reduction, and in the run-up to the World Conference.

<sup>1</sup> The present document has been submitted after the official documentation deadline due to resource constraints.



## 1. Introduction

1. The aim of this document is to help bring voluntary standards into the toolbox of disaster risk reduction, including both by encouraging their use by business and by enhancing their role in regulatory practice and policy-making more generally. To this end, the paper shows the potential the standards have in the prevention and management of disaster risks, and in situations of disruption and crisis.

2. A standard is formally defined as a “document approved by a recognized body that provides, for common and repeated use, rules, guidelines, or characteristics for products or related processes and production methods, with which compliance is not mandatory” (WTO, 1994).

3. Increased use of standards in the context of DRR is now being explicitly demanded by governmental, business and societal stakeholders. With contextualization, standards can be used across all sectors to:

- Increase the effectiveness and efficiency of both regulators and economic operators not only during crises, but in normal circumstances as well.
- Facilitate the adoption of a common risk management terminology and methodology by diverse stakeholders, bringing positive systemic effects.
- Provide sound metrics so that progress towards shared priorities can be accurately measured.
- Enhance accountability and transparency and facilitate comparisons across different areas of public concern and across different geographical locations.

4. As the UN Special Representative of the Secretary General for Disaster Risk Reduction eloquently says, in her document “Proposed Elements for Consideration in the Post 2015 Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction”: “The overall focus of disaster risk management (...) has to shift from shielding social and economic development against what are seen as external events and shocks, to one of transforming development to manage risks, sustainably seize opportunities, strengthen resilience, thereby ensuring a sustainable development”. In this context, environmental standards and best practice for corporate social responsibility can be used much further to prevent the accumulation of new disaster risk and to further change towards sustainable and resilient patterns of production and consumption (see Section 2 for details).

5. Standards – and in particular risk management standards – also have the potential to be used as a methodology for the effective pooling of different stakeholders’ resources for managing all kinds of risks, including natural hazards that may cause disasters (see Section 3 for details) in different sectors and contexts.

6. Finally, business continuity and emergency management standards enable both business and administrations to absorb shocks in a way that minimizes capital, human and eco-system losses (see Section 4 for details).

## 2. Voluntary standards for the prevention of disaster risks

7. Disaster risk prevention can be regarded as a facet and as a result of sustainable development. Standards help businesses and organizations progress towards all three dimensions of sustainable development – environmental, economic and social – and at the

same time help them address and, in some cases, completely master risks that without proper management would have disastrous consequences.

8. In each of these dimensions, at the same time as standards help deliver on development and growth, they also help deliver on disaster risk reduction, allowing a better or at least a different trade-off between the interests of “now”, and those of future generations.

9. The two very broad families of standards: environmental management standards and social responsibility standards have a potential to be used much further in reducing the accumulation of disaster risks.

10. Protecting “ecosystem services” – defined as the benefits that people derive from the environment – can both save lives and protect livelihoods. In fact, practices that protect the integrity and diversity of nature and ensure a wise use of natural resources maximize the degree to which the environment can absorb shocks.

11. A variety of voluntary approaches are available to firms that want to monitor and minimize the impact of their operations on the immediate ecosystem that surrounds their operations, and/or contribute to preserving the environment on a broader or indeed global scale. Some of these voluntary environmental programmes apply to specific industrial sectors (such as the “Responsible Care” programme for the chemical industry, or FSC for the forestry and paper industries), while others, like ISO 14000 can be adopted by organizations of all types and in any industrial sector.

12. The reach and uptake of ISO 14000 is particularly significant. Since its launch in 1995, ISO 14000 has become the most widely adopted voluntary environmental standard: by 2012, there were almost 300,000 certified organizations across more than 150 countries, with the majority of certifications in Europe, China and Japan.

13. Environmental management systems are typically implemented together with a number of other standards developed by international, regional and national standards bodies, as well as statutory requirements, which also contribute directly to ensuring that products, systems and services are designed, manufactured, operated and disposed of in a way that protects the natural environment by increasing reliability, minimizing emissions, reducing the use of natural resources and energy, etc.

14. While being neither a requirement nor a guarantee, establishing an EMS and being subject to external certification can be a significant driver for and shows a commitment to safer and more responsible business practices, which have a key role in preventing man-made disasters and reducing the impact of natural disasters.

15. Another area where standards and best practice can contribute to build resilience is corporate social responsibility (CSR) defined as the “responsibility of an organization for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment, through transparent and ethical behaviour that contributes to sustainable development” (ISO 26000).

16. The ISO 26000 Standard on Social Responsibility is a unique document, providing guidance applicable to different kinds of organizations that want to “incorporate social and environmental considerations in their decision making process”, and “be accountable for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment”.

17. This standard has provided one response to the dual trend of globalization of production, and of the transnational impact of disasters. In fact, recent years have seen corporations scaling up and diversifying their CSR activities to include a DRR component, going beyond their traditional local basis to include regional and global initiatives. There are numerous reasons for this trend, including companies’ drive for:

- Greater stability in supply chains operations: Businesses are increasingly keen to make investments for the resilience of areas from which they extract resources, or to which they subcontract manufacturing.
- Ensuring the security of employees. DRR engagement can reduce the impact of a disaster on staff and their families, in the wake of a disaster, enhancing staff motivation and retention.
- Exploring business opportunities. Engagement in disaster risk reduction can show its clients that it will be operational and able to deliver even in extreme circumstances.
- Enhanced brand positioning and goodwill. Investment in disaster risk reduction adds brand value among the communities in the affected areas.
- Meeting stakeholder expectations. Stakeholders in high risk locations require that companies are able to offer guarantees that their core practice ensures necessary safety considerations, in the event of a disaster.
- Mitigation of the impact of the liability issues. Preventive action can reduce the possibility of liability following a disaster and reduce the risk of damage to the reputation of a company.

18. In practice, a number of organizations that are active in CSR show consideration for disaster risk management in their operations, whether or not they incorporate international standards in this line of work. Examples of this engagement are numerous: in recent situations businesses let humanitarian organizations use their product delivery trucks to distribute emergency assistance to affected populations; or donate products or the time of their staff and their know-how. Still, the uptake of ISO 26000 and similar standards in business shows that there is demand for a “common way of doing things” not just in production chains, but increasingly, in the way decisions are taken and risks are identified, assessed, and managed.

### **3. Voluntary standards for the management of disaster risks**

19. The section above have provided examples of how voluntary standards help reduce the accumulation of new disaster risk by informing a new “development paradigm”. This paragraph reviews instead how standards allow for the management of disaster risks that are embedded in our immediate environment. This includes sector-specific disaster risks and we provide examples of risks to the built environment and to electrically powered utilities.

20. This paragraph goes on to introduce another broad category of standards – “risk management standards” – which provide a framework for structuring the management of an organization on the basis of the risks – whether natural or man-made – that it faces.

#### *Building codes*

21. In the housing sector, voluntary standards play a key role as a complement to regulations in mitigating the impact of disasters on affected populations. Standards and regulations both typically require that buildings and other forms of construction can adequately resist hazard stresses (e.g., increased wind loads in cyclone events, increased and irregular movements during seismic activity, increased loads due to pooled water during floods), as well as everyday hazards such as fires.

22. One factor that has contributed to enhance the quality of regulations in this sector has been the shift from a “prescriptive” to “performance based” regulations. “Prescriptive” specifications dictate how a building must be built – i.e. specific materials, assemblies,

construction and installations – whereas “performance-based” regulations focus on the desired outcome – i.e. why and for what purpose. Typically, performance-based regulations include a statement of policy goals and objectives – for example: to enable occupants to safely and rapidly evacuate in an emergency- along with a reference to standards that can be used for demonstrating that societal goals and objectives have been met.

23. Prescriptive regulations may require frequent legislative updates and large resources to run market checks, while a performance-based approach requires a more mature level of collaboration with industry, demanding consumers, a strong liability regime for producers and a good accreditation system. So different regulatory systems may be best adapted to different countries and risk scenarios. In the housing sector – like in others that are directly relevant to DRR – performance-based regulations have in many circumstances proved their worth in protecting public interest while at the same time reducing compliance costs.

24. Fulfilling the standards requirements – so as to ensure that the buildings can resist hazards that have been identified by the regulator as critical – is not necessarily costly, especially when it is planned at the start of a project.

25. In both prescriptive and performance based regulatory frameworks, even if standards to ensure safety are stable and widely available, and are not costly to implement, abuse – i.e. failure to implement the standards and to properly report implementation – is still a widespread problem that needs strengthened attention by both regulatory authorities and the business and standards community .

#### *Standards for electrotechnical equipment and infrastructure*

26. A number of international standards are used to help minimize the risks related to the use of electrotechnical equipment in the home, offices, manufacturing, public spaces and health facilities, in everyday life situations.

27. Because the impact of disasters may be significantly worsened by power outages that paralyze essential services and rescue infrastructures alike, international standards on electrotechnical equipment, power plants, and electrically powered utilities are a critical tool to increase the disaster resilience of essential infrastructure. These standards also play a key role in rapid response and long-term recovery.

28. Within the realm of electrical power provision and electrotechnical equipment, disaster risk reduction and impact mitigation require two interconnected sets of activities:

- Avoiding or minimizing the risk that electrotechnical equipment failures become themselves the root cause of man-made environmental disasters, and
- Ensuring that devices and systems, including alarm and emergency systems, are designed and built to resist failure during extreme conditions such as natural or manmade disasters.

29. Another important set of standards that may be relevant to DRR are those relating to micro-grids, which can autonomously maintain local power supply in the wake of disasters contributing to make response and recovery efforts more effective.

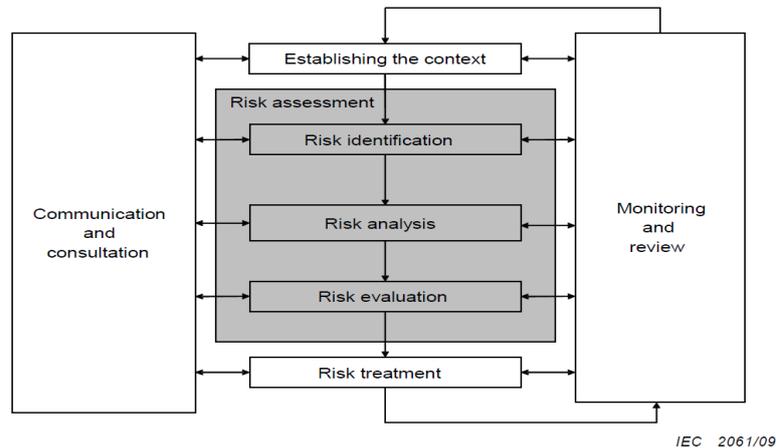
30. When electrotechnical equipment is designed, manufactured and installed in line with international standards this provides protection against fires, explosions, biological or chemical effects and radiation among other important risks.

#### *Risk management standards*

31. Risk-management standards use tools, indicators and language that can pool resources from diverse stakeholders and effectively ground both business strategies and policy-making objectives.

32. All organizations deal with risk in the same way: by identifying it, analysing it and then evaluating whether the risk should be modified by risk treatment. Risk management standards are a useful tool in representing and logically organizing this process in a way that makes decision-making open to inputs from different stakeholders, and accountable to the public, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1: IEC/ISO 31010 on “Risk management”**



33. Throughout the process of managing risk, communication and consultation with stakeholders remain essential, as are the constant monitoring and reviewing of the risks and controls that are in place to ensure that no further risk treatment is required. These two activities inform each of the steps of the risk management process.

34. After the context is set, and risks have been identified, the next step of the process is the analysis and evaluation of risks, so that the organization can decide how to prioritize previously identified risks so that the most important are addressed first, which is accomplished by comparing them all with one another.

35. Two elements of the concept of risk can be quantified as estimates: likelihood, and consequences. Likelihood can be quantified in terms of probability, and consequences for business are often expressed as monetary or time losses, whereas for a regulator the consequences could be economic loss, ecological damage or deterioration of public health. Afterwards, the expected value of a risk can be calculated by multiplying probability and consequences, which permits to rank all the risk.

36. In case risks cannot be quantitatively assessed, building a consequence/probability matrix is the most simple and commonly used tool for prioritizing risks. To apply this method, an organization develops customized scales for potential consequences and probabilities of events and a matrix that combines the two. Probability may be graded as “very low”, “low”, and “medium”, “high or very high”. Similarly, the whole range of consequences can be graded as having “very low”, “low”, “medium” or “high” and “very high” impact.

37. Once the risks have been ranked by both probability and consequences, the organization needs to rank every combination of probability and consequences (such as “high probability and high impact” – a critical risk), which will further help organizations and policy-makers decide if “risk treatment” is needed in order to satisfy the organization’s own risk criteria.

**Table 1: Ranking risks**

	Very low consequences	Low consequences	Medium consequences	High consequences	Very high consequences
Very low probability	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Medium risk
Low probability	Low risk	Low risk	Low risk	Medium risk	Medium risk
Medium probability	Low risk	Low risk	Medium risk	Medium risk	Critical risk
High probability	Low risk	Medium risk	Medium risk	Critical risk	Critical risk
Very high probability	Low risk	Medium risk	Critical risk	Critical risk	Critical risk

38. In all organizations, no matter whether they are a business, a policy or regulatory body or an NGO, risk treatment always involves four options: risk avoidance, risk reduction or mitigation, risk transfer or sharing, and risk retention.

39. All regulatory systems are established to ensure safety for the population and the natural environment in different scenarios, ranging from “business as usual”, to the progressive deterioration of the contextual location conditions, to more extreme climatic conditions, such as drought, and to the sudden disruption such as those caused by earthquakes or tropical cyclones.

40. Nonetheless, because safety has a cost, weighing costs against safety underlies all regulatory and management systems. A well-functioning regulatory system is based on an effective risk oversight and management process that allows regulatory and policy authorities to monitor the achievement of policy goals under their respective responsibility and to design lines of accountability accordingly.

41. To be effective, the risk oversight system of a regulatory authority should include the same elements that have been described above: the determination of the regulatory objectives, the identification of risks in attaining these objectives, the ranking of the risks, a structured mechanism for choice among risk treatment strategies, and a dedicated crisis management function.

42. In the context of DRR, strategies to mitigate risk include both regulations and alternatives to regulatory action, such as for example opening public procurement to companies who implement desired safety standards. Strategies to avoid a risk typically involve banning a dangerous activity: for example banning construction in a specific flood prone area. An example of a risk sharing strategy is making it compulsory for organizations or individuals to subscribe insurance for a specific risk.

43. Figure 2 illustrates the decisions that the management of a company or a regulatory authority can take in order to manage the risk of floods, presenting some of the strategies that can be developed under each of the four options.

**Figure 2: Alternative risk management strategies**

Risk avoidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decide not to build a factory on a flood prone river basin (management)</li> <li>• Ban construction in the flood prone area (regulatory authority)</li> <li>• Source critical intermediate products from nearby producers, avoiding dependence from locations exposed to high risk of floods (management)</li> </ul>
Risk reduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support initiatives to reduce global warming</li> <li>• Implement/encourage uptake of voluntary standards to reduce environmental impact of production plants</li> </ul>
Risk mitigation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purchase sandbags, place sensitive electrotechnical equipment above the ground level, arrange for record storage at offsite location</li> <li>• Prepare/enact disaster plans on a periodic basis</li> </ul>
Risk transfer/sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subscribe to insurance plans specifically covering the case of flood (management)</li> <li>• Contribute/plan for joint initiatives for societal stakeholders and the local business in case of flood (management &amp; authorities)</li> </ul>
Risk acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decide that the facility is far enough from predicted storm surge and take no further action (management)</li> <li>• Decide that the risk of floods for municipality does not warrant intervention</li> </ul>

44. When authorities decide that a risk is accepted, i.e. that no regulatory or policy response is deemed necessary, it is particularly important that the public is informed and that emergency or crisis action plans are set out in case that particular risk should occur, as section 4 below illustrates.

#### 4. Crisis management in regulatory frameworks

45. Crisis management is then an important part of the regulatory framework, which can also be informed and strengthened by the use of standards, including emergency management and business continuity standards.

46. All incidents, large or small – and all the more so natural disasters and weather-related hazards – have the potential to cause major disruptions to an organization's operations and its ability to deliver products and services. Implementing business continuity tools before a disruptive incident occurs will enable different kinds of organizations to resume operations before unacceptable levels of impact arise. Business continuity can be effective in dealing with both sudden disruptive incidents (e.g. an earthquake) and gradual ones (e.g. drought).

47. Standards for business continuity management (BCM) can be used by organizations of all sizes and types, including business but also governments, and can also inform the management of the essential infrastructure – such as hospitals, transport and communication networks, power and other utilities – on which our society depends especially during a situation of crisis.

48. Another important area, closely intertwined with business continuity management, is emergency management. The best standards and regulations cannot in fact prevent equipment and installations sustaining serious or total damage in case of severe adversity. Standards then play a key role as regards repair and live reparations. International standards for emergency management outline global best practice for incident response issues such as establishing command and control organizational structures and procedures, decision support, traceability and information management.

49. Interoperability amongst involved organizations is essential for successful incident response. ISO 22320 is one standard that helps ensure timely, relevant and accurate operational information by specifying processes, systems of work, data capture and

management. This standard also encourages community participation in the development and implementation of incident response measures, to ensure a response that is appropriate to the needs of the affected population as well as culturally acceptable.

50. Within the context of regulatory practice, the most important lesson that policy-makers can draw from BCM and emergency-management standards is that, to be effective, it is critical that “crisis management” be part of a risk-based regulatory system, rather than a separate and stand-alone regulatory framework.

51. Crisis management should ideally be one function integrated in a well-functioning regulatory regime. Knowing which controls can be relaxed during a crisis and which ones need to be retained requires a thorough risk assessment analysis, which can effectively ground the whole regulatory system and is of value also during normal circumstances as well.

52. For example, one strategically important sector that suffers greatly from natural disasters is utilities: energy plants as well as energy-powered utilities, such as water and sewage pumping stations. Ensuring that energy services are restored as soon as possible contributes to containing the impact of disasters, and to saving lives. Consequently, the responsible authorities – in an emergency situation – typically want to partially relax regulatory requirements so as to allow workers to secure the operation of vital electrotechnical equipment even if the resulting electrical safety would be less than that normally required.

53. When energy powered utilities are regulated on the basis of a risk-based regulatory system, if a situation of crisis arises delays are avoided and controls addressing the higher risks can be retained, while those addressing lesser safety risks can be relaxed. This is because disaster response is a priority that is embedded into the legislative system, so the system can be refocused as the risk/benefit balance changes.

54. To apply coherent approaches to crisis management, best practice from business organizations as compiled in standards can be adapted to regulatory practice and offers practical advice and guidance to policy-makers. It points to the importance of:

- Defining what is a risk to the system, and what represents a crisis situation, i.e. a situation that is beyond the capacity of normal organizational structures and processes to deal with;
- Defining the objectives of crisis management in precise terms that help guide ensuing activities “back to normal” or to “back to a new normal”;
- Having crisis management provisions laid out well before a crisis occurs and embedded in top-level legislative documents, so that appropriate opportunities for inputs from different stakeholders are effectively discussed before a crisis is underway;
- Clearly assigning responsibility and authority for performing crisis-related functions to well identified stakeholders, including identifying an agency that is responsible for crisis management at a central level;
- Putting into place an effective risk communication process that will be operational even in case of a crisis;
- Providing for effective coordination among different agencies and departments;
- Harmonizing crisis-management approaches and developing a common structure across sectors to increase efficiency.

55. Business organisations typically have separate structures that are normally dormant but that can be quickly mobilised in case of emergencies or crises. Regulatory authorities

can build on this practice, and - taking into account the internal and external context of a regulatory system, available resources, regulatory objectives, communication technologies and other factors - design a crisis management unit and a crisis management plan that can provide effective coordination of the actions taken by various stakeholders.

## **5. Promoting standards implementation for enhanced resilience**

56. Regulatory agencies and policy-makers can undertake a number of actions to sustain and encourage the uptake of standards by business. These include the following:

- Facilitate access to standards for various stakeholders.
- Encourage education on standards and standards-related issues in the context of DRR: Governments can definitely do more – in collaboration with standards development bodies and academia – to encourage the introduction by educational establishments of the subject of standardization into high schools and university curricula. Specific educational content about standards and DRR should also be developed.
- Enhance the credibility and international recognition of conformity assessment results. International accreditation organizations and international certification schemes may bring needed confidence in testing and certification carried out at the national level.
- Use standardization committees to involve the industry and other stakeholders in regulatory design. These influence groups can be usefully interfaced by regulators, offering inputs for improved regulatory design and more effective implementation in all area that are relevant to DRR including building codes, electrical codes and others.

57. Another important action authorities can take is to strengthen “quality infrastructure” (Q.I.) – the large array of infrastructure that is also needed to monitor and to provide credible proof not only of standards implementation but also of compliance with complex compulsory regulations, and to assess quality, reliability and dependability. Q.I. includes individual elements – standardization bodies, metrology institutions, testing laboratories, certification and accreditation bodies, that are closely linked in a network, which constitutes a coherent and well-functioning system only when all of its parts are functioning and interacting, and are based on internationally accepted standards and specifications.

58. One important component of quality infrastructure are conformity assessment procedures, which offer the assurance that products meet the requirements specified in regulations and standards, and can operate safely and reliably even in extreme circumstances.

59. When decisions are taken as to composition of the quality infrastructure, a careful balance should be observed between international trade priorities and the need to have capacity in place to test the resilience of the infrastructure and of the built environment to those disasters that are most likely to hit at the national level.

## **6. Conclusions and possible role of the Working Party**

60. Standards are an asset for DRR and can contribute to DRR becoming a transformational part of development strategies. Standards help involve new stakeholders in disaster risk reduction, by using a language that business and communities understand,

by setting out commitments that businesses and community find in their own best interest to honour and pursue, and by offering simple and agreed metrics that help measure progress and showcase excellency and success.

61. Standards also offer guidance to authorities in building risk-based regulatory frameworks in all sectors that are relevant to DRR, including in particular housing, electrotechnical equipment and the management of ecosystems. In risk-based regulatory frameworks, a careful risk assessment – including an assessment of disaster risks – informs the decision on whether or not policy intervention is warranted, the decision on which policy intervention is best suited to the risk that has been identified, and all decisions related to the implementation of the policy intervention.

62. Nevertheless, currently, there is still little understanding of the potential role standards can play to reduce and prevent disaster risks. Authorities can undertake a number of actions to spur further implementation of standards in the context of DRR. It is very important that they start by building awareness: by facilitating access to relevant standards by SMEs and NGOs, by encouraging education on DRR-related standards in universities and vocational institutions, and by involving the standardization community more aggressively into DRR consultations and platforms.

63. A second action item concerns quality infrastructure. To ensure proper implementation of standards a powerful infrastructure that allows for reliable inspections, audits, and precise measurements to be conducted by skilled professionals should be put in place. As regards the composition of a country's quality infrastructure, a careful balance should be observed between the drive towards industry's international trade priorities and the need to have capacity in place to test the resilience of the infrastructure and of the built environment to those very disasters that are most likely to hit at the national level. This rarely mentioned concern cannot be overemphasized.

64. A third area of priority is the need to embed risk management best practice, as embodied in standards, more fully in regulatory frameworks in sectors that are relevant to DRR. A common, risk-based approach that grounds relevant sectorial legislation will allow better coordination among different areas and different functions of government, and will facilitate accountability, transparency, and wider consultation with stakeholders. It is also important that the crisis management function is fully integrated in the regulatory process, instead of being set out in stand-alone legislation.

65. The standardization community is – at least to an extent - aware of and involved in the debate surrounding the SDGs. There is now a need to strengthen its understanding and involvement in the negotiations of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2 (HFA2) so as to facilitate the reach of the future framework to business. It is important then to further explore how implementation of voluntary standards could form part of additional commitments by business in the context of the negotiations of voluntary HFA2 commitments by business.

66. It is also important to further explore the role of standards in resilience and document and measure resilience. This effort can be especially fruitful in the area of environmental management as a contributing factor for the management of disaster risks. Finally, standards are also tools that promote a more just sharing of responsibility for disasters, because they promote accountability and shared and transparent decision-making processes. More efforts should be put in a codification of how ethical behaviour by business can help mitigate the impact and reduce the risks of disasters.

67. In this context, it is suggested that a discussion is initiated by the Working Party on the direction of further activities by the Secretariat and the Bureau in support of disaster risk reduction, and in the run-up to the World Conference.