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David Malone

Foreword by David Malone

When I was a boy of 8, my parents took me to live in Iran, a country of glorious mountain and desert landscapes, scenically complemented by lush seashores and marshes, permitting a very wide range of agricultural production, further enhanced by a system of millennia-old underground canals that channelled available fresh water across the country in various directions, allowing for both limited crops and human habitation in otherwise parched plains. It is also a country of rich history, going back to the era of very early civilizations, and glorious culture, from literature, the graphics arts to many forms of music and other artistic achievements of enviable refinement.

The country, however, was prone to natural disasters, stemming in part from its geological fault-lines and multiple subsurface instabilities. In 1962, just before my family moved, a devastating earthquake took approximately 12,000 lives in the ancient city of Qazvin, quite close to the capital Tehran and to the fabled Elburz mountains, which had been pierced by ambitious and daring roads constructed in the 1920s and 1930s, and within which dams had been increasingly built in the post-Second World War decades. It was a miracle that none of these were destroyed by the earthquake and that, given its magnitude, ultimately so relatively few perished. Later, one of my classmates perished when the car in which he was travelling with his family in those very mountains, was pulverized by a rock slide, probably provoked by the use of a loud truck horn elsewhere in the gorge where they died. These disasters and many other similar ones afflicting that glorious land have remained engraved in my memory from a young age.

For this reason, when I came to Japan, as an international civil servant, soon after the Fukushima tsunami and the nuclear accident it provoked, I was highly attuned to the natural disaster-prone nature of its beautiful, rugged isles. And when Mr. Sassa, Secretary-General of the International Consortium on Landslides (ICL), did me the honour of suggesting I take on the mantle of a very distinguished predecessor of mine at the UN University, Dr. Hans van Ginkel, as Honorary Chairman of the consortium, I was delighted to agree.

Japan's experience of interlocking natural disasters, is, alas, an intense, recurring and hugely painful one. As I write, Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four largest islands, and a singularly beautiful one, is being lashed for the sixth successive day by torrential rains (and this very early in the summer typhoon season), provoking flash floods and wider flooding, soil erosion, mud slides and various other inter-related challenges that have, so far, cost at least 58 lives, with these rains perhaps intensifying over coming days.

In January 2005, in Kobe, Japan, Dr. van Ginkel chaired discussions on new international initiatives for research into mitigation of floods and landslides, during the second World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR). Ten years earlier, Kobe had been pulverized by a 7.2 strength earthquake on the

Richter scale, claiming over 6000 lives and injuring over 40,000. Since then, focus on natural disasters has increased at the international level, not least as climate-related disasters, including increasingly severe storms, hurricanes and typhoons, and related loss of life and damage, are multiplying.

That session of the WCDR was welcomed by my friend Koichiro Matsuura, recently Director General of UNESCO, and a number of other leaders of international organizations. A year later, the 2006 meeting at the UN University Headquarters in Tokyo, led by Dr. van Ginkel, adopted the Tokyo Action Plan, which created the triennial World Landslide Forum and the Global Promotion Committee of the International Programme on Landslides. ICL soon thereafter formed active partnerships with relevant international organizations, which it maintains today. Its work continues, later this year.

I am delighted to be associated with ICL, Mr. Sassa and his colleagues. I look forward to joining the discussions at Kyoto this fall, to be conducted online, due to the current COVID-19 pandemic.

David Malone
 Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
 Rector of United Nations University