



Presentation of the plaque of appreciation to the Disaster Management and Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe by Chairman (ADPC) Board of Trustees Prof. Dr. Krasae Chanwongse at the launch of the seventh meeting of the Regional Consultative Committee on Disaster Management.

Significant strides in disaster prevention since tsunami

Rasika Somarathna

Sri Lanka has taken significant strides in disaster prevention and mitigation since the Boxing Day catastrophe in 2004, said Disaster Management and Human Rights Minister Mahinda Samarasinghe launching the seventh meeting of the regional Committee on Disaster Management yesterday.

While calling the tsunami as an eye opener, the Minister noted that the country had come a long way with an effective mechanism in place today to counter such disasters in the future.

The seventh meeting of the RCC was started in Colombo yesterday, with the participation of 19 Asian member countries under the theme of "Rights-based community-led disaster risk reduction".

The Minister said before the tsunami both disaster management and disaster

risk management was a subject which was not given much thought by authorities.

"The tsunami waves took one and a half hours to reach the Eastern shores of Sri Lanka, so if we had an early warning system in place, we could have been able to save thousands of lives," the Minister said.

Since then an effective quick reaction mechanism has been set up with 50 early warning towers spanning the coastal belt throughout the country with a 24 hour operational centre with satellite links, which would relay a warning within 15 minutes," the Minister said.

"Now we have a Disaster Management Act and a Centre with sub offices at the grassroots level throughout the country, with capacity building efforts and an effective mechanism to mobilise all forces," he added. The RCC during

their three day deliberations is set to discuss various initiatives undertaken by member countries on the subject.

It would also have a special session on initiatives on disaster risk reduction in Sri Lanka.

In addition the RCC would discuss matters regarding mainstreaming disaster risk reduction into development planning and policy thus highlighting the need to promote safer development as an element for sustainable development.

The RCC was established by the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC) in 2000 and comprising of members who are working in key Government positions in the National Disaster Management Systems of Countries in the Asian region.

The event was attended by a number of Government Secretaries, Ministry officers and foreign delegates from 38 member nations.