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MEMBER economies of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation have incurred more than \$100 billion in losses due to natural disasters over the last decade, prompting the need to boost defenses against the “new normal” of increasing threats of natural calamities due to climate change.

This need was addressed recently after senior disaster management officials from Pacific Rim economies introduced a new collaborative platform called Apec Framework on Disaster Risk Reduction.

The said framework is expected to guide policy coordination within and between Apec economies to combat the rising frequency, magnitude and scope of disasters that are endangering lives and economic stability like never before.

Emphasis is on the advancement of measures under four pillars: Prevention and mitigation; preparedness; response, and rehabilitation and rebuilding.

“The world today is experiencing the increasing complexities of disasters brought about by natural hazards and human-induced elements,” National Defense Secretary and National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council chair Voltaire T. Gazmin was quoted in the Apec statement as saying.

“The prevalence of disasters in the ‘new normal’ manifestation has serious implications to our inter-economic relations. This ‘new normal’ phenomenon causes major disruptions to trade relations, businesses and investments across the Asia-Pacific region,” Gazmin said.

The framework was deemed crucial considering that Apec economies, which collectively account for about three billion people, half of global trade, and 60 percent of global economy, experience more than 70 percent of all natural disasters.

“With the emerging concept of the ‘new normal,’ we need more holistic, proactive, multi-stakeholder and longer term interventions specifically to make our economies resilient against disasters,” Gazmin said.

“The Apec framework on disaster risk reduction is primarily aimed to promote Apec-wide collaboration on disaster risk reduction by providing a common direction in order for the economies to be more responsive to the new realities on the serious threats and challenges posed by stronger and more frequent disasters,” he added.

Under the framework, Apec members will pursue enhanced cooperation across all areas of their policy agenda—from ensuring regional trade and investment flows, business continuity in the micro, small and medium enterprise sector, and critical infrastructure and financial resiliency, to the protection of food security, health and the environment.

The framework also calls for disaster risk reduction to be elevated as a focus in Apec. It also commits Apec member economies to formulate an action plan that will serve as an implementation, monitoring and evaluation tool for realizing common disaster resiliency goals.

This included the identification of a set of targets for the Asia-Pacific region, taking into account conditions in Apec economies, and with emphasis on complementing rather than duplicating efforts underway through parallel international arrangements.

The Apec Emergency Preparedness Working Group will serve as the central administrative body for this work.

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“Elevating disaster risk reduction to the ministers level will help upscale Apec’s role in providing directions, setting benchmarks and in determining future plans for the entire region in managing the ‘new normal’. We commit to empower disaster managers across the region so that they can fully respond to and effectively address the rapidly changing landscape of disaster risk reduction and neutralize the emergence of the ‘new normal’ disaster situations,” Gazmin said.