



United Nations  
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For more information  
Please contact:

Brigitte Leoni  
Media Relations  
Tel: +41 22 917 8897  
leonib@un.org  
www.unisdr.org

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Earthquakes caused the deadliest disasters in the past decade**

*Geneva* - In the past decade, nearly 60 per cent of the people killed by disasters died because of earthquakes, the Center for Research on Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) revealed today in a joint press conference with the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR).

“Earthquakes are the deadliest natural hazard of the past ten years and remain a serious threat for millions of people worldwide as eight out of the ten most populous cities in the world are on earthquake fault-lines,” said Margareta Wahlström, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction.

“Disaster risk reduction is an indispensable investment for each earthquake-prone city and each community. Seismic risk is a permanent risk and cannot be ignored. Earthquakes can happen anywhere at any time. Risk reduction will be a main priority in the Haiti reconstruction process, and we will be working with our partners to ensure that it is central in the reconstruction” continued Wahlström.

According to the figures released today by CRED in Geneva, 3,852 disasters killed more than 780,000 people over the past ten years, affected more than two billion others and cost a minimum of 960 billion US\$.

In terms of human losses, Asia is the continent that has been struck again and again by disasters during the last decade, accounting for 85 per cent of all fatalities.

After earthquakes, storms (22%) and extreme temperatures (11%) were the most deadly disasters between 2000 and 2009.

The most deadly disasters of the 2000 decade were the Indian Ocean Tsunami, which hit several countries in Asia (2004) leaving 226,408 dead; Cyclone Nargis, which killed 138,366 people in Myanmar (2008); and the Sichuan earthquake in China (2008), causing the deaths of 87,476 people. 73,338 people were also killed in the earthquake in Pakistan (2005) and 72,210 in heat waves in Europe (2003).

“The number of catastrophic events has more than doubled since the 1980-1989 decade. In contrast, the numbers of affected people have increased at a slower rate. This may be due to better community preparedness and prevention,” said Professor Guha-Sapir, Director of CRED.

Of the two billion affected people, 44 per cent were affected by floods and 30 per cent by droughts, while earthquakes accounted for 4 per cent.

The annual average death toll for the 2000 decade was 78,000, which is considerably higher than the 43,000 of the previous decade (1990s). But in the 1980s, the annual average of persons killed was almost as high with 75,000 owing to two major droughts and famines in Ethiopia and Sudan. The average number of natural hazard events per annum in 2000-2009 was 385 compared to the annual average of 258 for the decade 1990-1999 and 165 for the decade 1980-1989.

The annual average of 96 billion US\$ is more than twice as high as the respective figure for the 1980s (39 billion US\$), but remains slightly below the 99 billion US\$ annual average of the decade 1990-99.

In 2009, the total number of people killed and affected by disasters was lower than in 2008, as no major disaster occurred: 327 events killed 10,416 people, affected nearly 113 million others and caused a total of 34.9 billion US\$ economic damages.

The 2009 figures remain also well below the 2000-2008 annual averages, which were 85,535 (deaths), 229,792,397 (total affected) and 102.7 billion US\$ (economic damages).

The disaster with the highest death toll was the 7.6 magnitude earthquake in Sumatra, Indonesia on 30 September, which killed over 1100. Furthermore, typhoons Morakot, Ketsana and Parma and floods caused many deaths in Asia, rendering the continent once again the most affected one. Six of the top 10 countries with the highest number of disaster-related deaths were in Asia.

“By far the majority of the people affected have been by climate-related events such as floods and storms,” said Professor Guha-Sapir. “Although these events are climate events, their impact on home settlements can be determined by non-climate factors such as urbanization, urban planning and deforestation.” CRED argues that these factors can be managed to reduce the impact of those events.

#### **Note to the editor:**

- The eight most populous cities on earthquake fault-lines are: Tokyo, Mexico City, New York, Mumbai, Delhi, Shanghai, Kolkata and Jakarta.  
Source: Chafe, Z. (2007) ‘Reducing natural disaster risk in cities’, in *2007 State of the World: Our Urban Future*, World Watch Institute, Washington, DC; cited in UNHABITAT (2009) *2009 Global Report on Human Settlements: Planning Sustainable Cities: policy directions*.
- CRED is a World Health Organization collaborating centre based in Brussels. Since 1988, CRED has been maintaining an Emergency Events Database known as EM-DAT. EM-DAT includes all disasters from 1900 until present, which fit at least one of the following criteria:
  - 10 or more people killed.

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- 100 or more people affected.
  - Declaration of a state of emergency.
  - Call for international assistance.
  
  - To access the EM-DAT database, visit <http://www.emdat.be/>
  - EM-DAT data is also available at <http://www.PreventionWeb.net> on all country and hazard pages. PreventionWeb.net is the ISDR System website serving the information needs of the disaster reduction community.
  
  - For more information on the CRED figures, please also contact:  
**Régina Below**  
**Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED)**  
**Ecole de Santé Publique - Université Catholique de Louvain**  
**Tel. +32-2-764-3326 - fax: +32-2-764-3441**  
**E-mail: [regina.below@uclouvain.be](mailto:regina.below@uclouvain.be) Internet: <http://www.cred.be>**