

Press release

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MARSHALL ISLANDS WATER CRISIS UNDERLINES PACIFIC'S DROUGHT RISK

19 June 2013, BANGKOK –The UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) today issued a warning that a lack of safe drinking water is emerging as a major natural hazard for many small islands in the Pacific.

UNISDR Head for Asia-Pacific, Jerry Velazquez, said: "The worsening situation in the Republic of the Marshall Islands is a strong warning for the whole of the Pacific of the potential suffering that drought brings particularly as many islands in the Pacific have limited water supplies."

More than 6,700 people on the Marshall Islands have a lack of safe water as drought conditions have depleted water tanks and made groundwater unsuitable for human consumption due to high salinity. The government has declared a "state of drought disaster".

The drought will be among the issues discussed by delegates gathering for the Joint Pacific Platform for Disaster Risk Management and Pacific Climate Change Roundtable in Nadi, Fiji, 8-11 July.

"The Marshall Islands crisis clearly shows how important it is for Pacific Islands to integrate drought mitigation measures into their national planning and risk assessments," said Mr. Velazquez.

"We mainly think about sea level rise and cyclone risks when we talk about Small Island Developing States (SIDS) but drought is also threatening thousands of communities. We need to make better use of weather forecasts for early drought warning. There is also a need for improved rain water harvesting and other community-based measures.

The recently released UN 2013 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction warns of how climate change will magnify the disaster risk in SIDS around the world. Around 250 delegates, including representatives from various Pacific Islands, are scheduled to attend the Joint Meeting in Fiji and will discuss the successor of the Hyogo Framework for Action, the ten-year global plan of action to reduce disaster risk, which ends in 2015.

About UNISDR: UNISDR is the UN office dedicated to disaster risk reduction. It is led by the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Disaster Risk Reduction and supports implementation of the *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters* which seeks "the substantial reduction of disaster losses, in lives and in the social, economic and environmental assets of communities and countries."