

Press release

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2013 FLOODS “A TURNING POINT” SAYS UNISDR

25 June 2013, GENEVA –The Head of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), Margareta Wahlström, today predicted that the year 2013 will be a turning point in how governments around the world view the threat of floods in a new age of extreme weather events.

She said: “India, Nepal, Canada and many countries in Europe have experienced huge losses over the last two months due to intense precipitation events which have triggered extreme flooding affecting millions of people’s well-being and livelihoods.

“The shocking loss of life in India underlines how vitally important it is that we start planning for future scenarios far removed from anything that we may have experienced in the past. When we look at the worldwide escalation in economic losses from disasters over the last five years it is clear that our exposure to extreme events is growing and this trend needs to be addressed through better land use and more resilient infrastructure as we seek to cope with population growth and rapid urbanization.

“Flood management systems need to be designed so that even if they are overwhelmed by floodwaters, the failure is not catastrophic. UNISDR emphasises the need for early warning systems, reduction of social vulnerability through land use planning and leadership at local government level.”

On average, some 250 million people have been affected annually by floods over the last ten years and they are the single most widespread and increasing disaster risk to urban settlements of all sizes. Flooding is an extensive recurring risk which causes enormous damage to critical infrastructure including transport systems, roads, schools and health facilities.

Major contributing factors include poor urban planning which increases flood hazard due to unsuitable land use change; increases in paving and other impermeable surfaces; poorly maintained drainage, sanitation and solid waste infrastructure.

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.”