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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR DISASTER REDUCTION
8 October 2008**

The observance of the International Day for Disaster Reduction for 2008 takes place in a year that has seen more than its fair share of natural calamities, and falls on the third anniversary of the earthquake in South Asia. With the casualties of that disaster and of this year's Wenchuan Earthquake and Cyclone Nargis still fresh in our minds, it is all the more appropriate to recall the lessons we have learned.

Nearly four years ago, Governments adopted the Hyogo Framework for Action, which aims to reduce our collective vulnerability to natural hazards. But we must do more to turn commitments on paper into deeds that can keep the next major disaster from taking so many lives and destroying so many livelihoods. Now more than ever, when we are trying to accelerate national and international efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, disaster risk reduction needs to be acknowledged and incorporated as a key plank of that work. The threats posed by climate change – including increasing droughts, floods and storms – increases the urgency further still, particularly in the world's poorest, most vulnerable communities.

The World Disaster Reduction Campaign for 2008-2009 focuses on making "Hospitals Safe from Disasters". When health facilities are damaged, so, too, is our ability to improve maternal and child health and to provide other essential health services. But in resilient communities, health systems are better able to withstand natural hazards. We need to mobilize society at every level to reduce risk and protect health facilities so that they can save lives.

I urge all partners – Governments, civil society, international financial institutions and the private sector -- to step up implementation of the Hyogo Framework. Disaster risk reduction is everybody's business. Only by investing in tangible risk reduction measures can we reduce vulnerability and protect development. On this International Day, let us renew our dedication to this vital task.