

World Environment Day Statement

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On the Occasion of
The First Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction
June 5, 2007

Today, as the First Session of the Global Platform opens here in Geneva, people around the world are celebrating World Environment Day. This year's theme addresses the challenges facing the people and ecosystems of the Arctic and Antarctic as a result of rapid environmental and climatic change.

As highlighted in a new report being issued today by the United Nations Environment Programme entitled "Global Outlook: Ice and Snow", it is now increasingly clear that melting glaciers and ice caps are an early warning sign of global warming. But while the Arctic in particular is undergoing dramatic changes before our very eyes, other regions of the world will not be far behind. And of particular importance to the ISDR, one of the expected consequences of these changing climate patterns and rising temperatures will be an upsurge in potential disasters.

In the words of UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner, "The invoice for our climate-changing emissions will include more droughts, floods and other climate-related hazards. We need to 'climate proof' our farms, our infrastructure and our livelihoods in order to minimize our vulnerability to future hazards."

Confirmation of the new climate realities was provided a few weeks ago in a new assessment report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. The IPCC concluded that rising temperatures are already accelerating the hydrological cycle and increasing the risk of floods, droughts and intense storms. The additional stresses that climate change will place on infrastructure and food and water resources, and the prospect of greater numbers of environmental refugees, conspire to further increase our vulnerability to disasters.

Many of the measures that the IPCC identifies for adapting to climate change can also apply to disaster risk management. Early action to improve seasonal climate forecasts, food security, freshwater supplies, disaster and emergency response, famine early-warning systems and insurance coverage can minimize the damage and suffering caused by future climate change while generating many immediate practical benefits for today's disaster risk reduction. More broadly, by following good environmental practices and keeping ecosystems intact, and restoring those that have declined, we can ensure a more resilient natural environment that can absorb the impacts of climate-related disasters more effectively than a degraded one.

By joining forces, the climate change and disaster-reduction communities can help to boost investments in these early warning and response measures. Together, we can spread the message that adaptation and risk reduction strategies not only save lives but

can save money and other national resources. Our combined messages can convince policymakers and community leaders alike that, with natural hazards likely to worsen, prevention must be a greater priority than it is today.

Of course, one of the best ways to reduce the risk of climate-related disasters is to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions in the first place. Many of the ISDR partners are fully engaged in efforts to promote the use of cleaner technologies and the adoption of climate-friendly technologies. The Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism, the Global Environment Facility and many other sources of financial support are channeling funds into projects for reducing emissions.

As we consider the dramatic warming occurring in the far North, then, and anticipate unwanted changes in more crowded and vulnerable parts of the world, let us join UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon in pushing for more aggressive political action to tackle the source of climate change. But let us also work together now to strengthen the disaster risk reduction systems (prevention, mitigation and preparedness) so urgently needed in today's world and by tomorrow's. Thank you.