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PRESS RELEASE

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The Federal Government of Germany and city of Bonn are helping La Paz to set up a new early warning system against floods and landslides.

The Lady Mayor of Bonn, Ms Bärbel Dieckmann will meet with Mr Del Granado Cosio, the mayor of the Bolivian capital, from 14 to 15 November in La Paz, Bolivia, to officially launch a project to create a new early warning system that will better protect La Paz against floods and landslides.

Floods and mudslides are recurrent disasters in La Paz. The Bolivian city lies along a narrow valley crossed by more than two hundred rivers, including subterranean rivers, and suffers from unstable geological conditions. The rapid growth of the city has forced many people to live in flood plains and high slope hills, making them particularly vulnerable to floods and mudslides during the rainy season (December to March).

The last big floods in February 2002 killed 77 people, affected 5000 lives, and caused about US\$100 million in damage, according to the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters.

Bonn has a long relationship with La Paz and was one of the first to respond to the city's call for project assistance during the Third International Early Warning Conference held in Bonn in March 2006. The Federal Government of Germany will provide about US\$600,000 to La Paz for the first phase of establishing the early warning system, which will benefit up to 300,000 people highly vulnerable to flood and landslides. Germany is particularly committed to strengthening early warning capacities in regions that are affected by recurrent disasters.

“The idea of this project was born in Bonn, when Mayor Del Granado Cosio gathered with representatives of UN/ISDR, UNU-EHS and a German association for natural catastrophes. The City of Bonn is very happy to contribute to reducing the risk that thousands of people face due to floods and landslides,” said Mayor Dieckmann.

The city of Bonn will work closely with the Municipal Government of La Paz to implement the new flood and landslide early warning system together with other public and private organizations, NGOs and civil society representatives incorporated into the La Paz Emergency Operations Committee (EOC). The EOC was created in November 2002 as part of the Risk Management Municipal System to respond to disasters and emergencies.

The UNDP in La Paz in collaboration with the UN/ISDR Platform for the Promotion of Early Warning (PPEW) in Bonn, and the UN/ISDR Regional Office in Panama, will also play important roles in the implementation of the system, in enabling the population of La Paz to understand the early warning system and react to it appropriately.

"Early warning systems are only effective if people understand their purpose and know what to do when they are activated. The UN/ISDR will help train the people of La Paz to improve their responses and to increase their capacity to deal with disasters" says Salvano Briceño, Director of the UN/ISDR secretariat.

The Early Warning System (EWS) will include three components: a monitoring system for sudden floods, a monitoring system for the manifested risks zones, and a system for flood forecasting. It will also integrate other components such as an updated risk map of La Paz, a socio-economic impact and vulnerability study related to flood and landslide hazards, a strategy for citizen training and information on disaster responsiveness and a dissemination module on the results and lessons learned.