



United Nations  
International Strategy for Disaster Reduction  
*Secretariat, Geneva*

For more information  
please contact:

Dizery Salim  
Public Information Officer/Media Relations  
Tel: +41 22 917 8918  
salimd@un.org  
www.unisdr.org

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **UNISDR urges parliamentarians to take action on disaster reduction**

Geneva, Switzerland –The UN’s agency for disaster risk reduction is calling on international lawmakers to take action on disaster risk reduction as a means to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and adapt to climate change.

UNISDR director Salvano Briceño presented an advocacy kit on disaster risk reduction to parliamentarians at the 123<sup>rd</sup> Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which recently met from 4 to 6 October in Geneva. The aim of the kit is to spread awareness about disaster reduction in their countries.

“The MDGs cannot be achieved and climate change impacts can not be minimized if we do not reduce risk to natural hazards,” Briceño told the IPU’s Governing Council. “Parliamentarians play an essential role in implementing disaster risk reduction policies as they can influence their country’s spending laws.”

Following the presentation of the kit to parliamentarians, Hon. Ms. Saumura Tioulong, a member of Cambodia’s Permanent Committee of the National Assembly, said storms and earthquakes were natural occurrences, but added that what is not natural is lack of preparedness.

“Prevention costs only a small portion of any budget,” she said, adding that in Pakistan, “millions spent on prevention would have avoided the billions spent on the cost in repair.”

Recent studies show that \$1 invested in reducing disaster risk could produce as much as \$37 in savings, although the ratio of investment to savings varies widely depending on the country and cause of disaster.

According to UNISDR, the cost of disaster-related damage had risen 13 times from \$75.5 billion in the 1960s to roughly \$1 trillion in the past decade. Damage includes the collapse of schools during disasters, which makes achieving the MGD on universal education a challenge. About 95% of schools in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, were destroyed in the January earthquake.

The health sector faces similar problems during times of disaster. The 2005 Indian Ocean tsunami, for example, destroyed 61% of health facilities in Indonesia’s Aceh province, killing many healthcare workers and causing an overall public health crisis. This year, in flood-affected Pakistan,

half a million women were expected to give birth in the next six months, raising grave questions about healthcare delivery.

Briceño said the devastating floods in Pakistan are also a stark reminder that disaster risk reduction is a “must” to protect development gains and to help reach the MDG of halving poverty by 2015.

“Natural hazards, such as floods, earthquakes and cyclones, often derail communities that are ill prepared, becoming full-blown disasters because of poverty and unsafe development practices,” he warned. “Ecosystem degradation, combined with the impacts of climate change and increasing urban density, also adds to the risk of disaster.”

Responding to the threats, the IPU passed a resolution, which calls on parliaments to urge their governments to provide adequate and accessible resources to UN agencies involved in providing disaster assistance. The resolution also calls on the international community to support the UN in developing a parliamentary programme on disaster risk reduction that focuses on mitigation, prevention and preparedness. In particular, parliaments should urge their governments to develop risk reduction strategies under the Capacity for Disaster Reduction Initiative (CADRI), a joint initiative of OCHA, UNDP and UNISDR.

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