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PRESS RELEASE

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UNISDR urges governments and private sector to reduce disaster losses together

Geneva, Switzerland – Margareta Wahlström, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, asked governments and the private sector today to develop a new cooperative approach to reduce disaster losses.

“Governments, the private sector and donors need to team up to make cities and communities more resilient against disasters,” she said at a press conference to mark the International Day for Disaster Reduction. “We will not be able to achieve our goals without this strong partnership.”

According to the Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction released last year by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), the cost of disaster-related damage rose from \$75.5 billion in the 1960s to roughly \$1 trillion in the past decade. And costs continue to rise. This year alone, 235 disasters caused an estimated US\$81 billion damage which is already the double of total losses in 2009.

“Disaster risk reduction is an obligation for all—donors, governments and the private sector,” said Toni Frisch from the Swiss Humanitarian Aid Department. “We cannot wait for more disasters to happen to understand the benefits of disaster risk reduction policies. It is easy to show the damage caused by a disaster but much more difficult to get attention when the damage is invisible.”

Noting that Switzerland already invests more than 10% of its international aid in prevention, he added many disasters were less impactful because of these disaster risk reduction investments. This, for example, was the case for a school in Haiti, which did not collapse after the earthquake.

According to the OECD, global humanitarian assistance was \$16.9 billion in 2008, with \$12.8 billion coming from governments and \$4.1 billion from private funding. In 2008, only 0.7% of the humanitarian aid was allocated to prevention. Although, this is an improvement compared to 0.1% in 2001, there is still a long way to go to reach the 10% target for relief and reconstruction aid and the 1% for development aid that were recommended at the last 2009 Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction.

With more natural hazards expected, it is the world’s cities that will bear a tremendous burden. When cities do not function, millions of jobs are threatened, economic opportunities are lost and businesses are disrupted.

Small businesses are an important part of the private sector economy and can play a significant role in improving a community's disaster resilience.

“Working with UNISDR is an obvious partnership for all small businesses,” said Philip Verges from Small Equity Initiative. “Small business owners and managers are often members of the community where they provide their products and services.”

“Small businesses are an important source disaster risk reduction support. They can build homes, commercial buildings and civil infrastructure, and provide communications as part of an emergency contingency plan” said Verges.