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PRESS RELEASE

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THIRD ASIAN MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE IN MALAYSIA

Governments meet to discuss disaster risk reduction action plans

(Kuala-Lumpur, Malaysia)- Concerned about the increasing vulnerability of Asian communities, high-level representatives from more than 80 Asian countries will gather tomorrow (Tuesday 2 December) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia for a three-day Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction to discuss policies and measures that can reduce the impact of disasters in this part of the world.

The Asia Pacific is one of the most populous regions in the world and is, by far, the most disaster affected in terms of human and economic impacts. According to the Center of Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), 2008 has been a particularly bad year for the region, with more than 230 000 people killed and over 47 million affected by two major events alone: the Sichuan earthquake in China and the Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar.

Governments will take the opportunity provided by the Third Ministerial Conference to reaffirm their commitment to the Hyogo Framework for Action, which was adopted in Kobe, Hyogo Japan as a unique plan to reduce disaster losses by 2015 and increase the resilience of communities to disasters.

The theme of the Ministerial Conference, co-organised by the Malaysian government and the secretariat for the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), will be “Multi-stakeholder Partnerships for Disaster Risk Reduction in the Asia Pacific region.” A particular focus will be public-private partnerships for disaster risk reduction and community-based disaster risk reduction activities. Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badwi will officially open the Conference.

“The Third Ministerial Conference is a main forum to make disaster risk reduction a priority at the local level and to mobilize more resources for implementing disaster risk reduction policies, which are vital to development and poverty reduction. This is a unique opportunity to identify gaps and bring governments and civil society together to fill them” says Salvano Briceño, Director of the UNISDR secretariat.

The Conference will hold a number of high-level round tables and technical sessions to highlight the importance of empowering national and local governments to reduce the impacts of disasters. More than 600 participants are expected to attend the Ministerial Conference, among them representatives from civil society, NGOs, academic institutions, the donor community, media organisations, UN agencies and regional organisations working in the field of disaster risk reduction.

A final declaration urging governments to commit more resources to disaster risk reduction policies and to engage more public-private partnerships are expected to be the main outcomes of the Conference.

Asian Ministerial Conferences on Disaster Risk Reduction have been organized every two years since 2005 as an initiative of a national government. The Government of China organized the first Ministerial Conference in Beijing in September 2005, which had a global focus. The second was organized in November 2007 by the Indian government and focused on regional achievements. The upcoming Malaysian conference will advocate more action planning at the national and local levels.

According to CRED, disasters in the region during 2007 affected more than 191 million people, killed 13 400 others and caused a total of \$US 34 546 million worth of damages. The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami claimed the lives of more than 226 000 people in the region.