

Strong commitment to disaster risk reduction in Myanmar

Yangon, 14 October 2011 – Myanmar, a country prone to natural hazards, has shown positive progress in the areas of early warning, emergency preparedness and responses in recent years. Now, the Government is stepping up cooperation with global and regional partners to reach its long-term target of becoming a disaster resilient country.

This was a key message from the commemorative event on the occasion of the International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction held in Myanmar's capital Nay Pyi Taw on 13 October. The event was attended by some 400 representatives, including officials from all states and regions in Myanmar, diplomats, the UN, international and national non-governmental organizations and other key stakeholders.

The International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction is organized every year to raise awareness about ways to reduce the risks posed by earthquakes, floods, cyclones and other natural hazards. This year's theme was 'Children and Young People as Partners for Disaster Risk Reduction'.

In his opening statement, the Vice-President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Dr. Sai Mauk Kham, reiterated that the Government would continue to do its utmost to build a better disaster management mechanism, with support from the international community.

"While Myanmar is trying to strive for rural development and poverty alleviation, the disasters cause damage to livelihoods of individual citizens and critical infrastructures of the affected regions. Thus, it is important to link up the disaster reduction endeavours with poverty alleviation programmes as not to hinder development tasks," said the Vice-President.

Over the past three years, the Government, together with the humanitarian and development aid community have sought to invest in disaster risk reduction and disaster preparedness measures and programmes in support to communities, in order to reduce their vulnerability and increase their readiness in case of disasters. At the commemorative event on 13 October, the Government announced its intention to ensure that schools, hospitals and rural health centres across the country are better prepared to cope with the impact of natural hazards.

Ms. Margareta Wahlström, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, who is currently on a 4-day mission to Myanmar, welcomed recent initiatives by the Government in the area of disaster risk reduction. In her statement, which followed her read-out of the UN Secretary-General's message, she pointed to milestones such as

the Myanmar Action Plan on Disaster Risk Reduction, the drafting of the Disaster Management Law and National Building Codes and the commitment to mainstream disaster risk reduction in sector work such as education and health.

“I have observed positive progress in disaster management and risk reduction in Myanmar over the last years. The response to Cyclone Giri in 2010 and Shan State Earthquake in March 2011 by the Government, UN agencies, NGOs and other partners have reflected many of the lessons learned from Cyclone Nargis and are the manifestation to the capacities developed in the areas of early warning, emergency preparedness and response at both the central and regional levels, and the increased attention to the losses caused by disasters,” said Ms. Margareta Wahlström.

“But of course we all have much work to do, as disaster frequency is increasing and in spite of an improved preparedness and response, economic losses continue to rise due to high vulnerability and exposure. A lot of disasters are the result of development pathways we choose: in land use, in urbanization, and increasing complexity and economic interdependency. It is vital that a comprehensive legislation and policy framework is in place to guide the implementation by all sectors, regions and states to allow for wise allocation of resources for vulnerability reduction and building resilience of communities at risk,” she said.

During her visit to Nay Pyi Taw Ms. Wahlström met with the Vice President and several Union Ministers, including the Minister for Social Welfare, Relief & Resettlement, the Minister for Health, the Minister for Education, and the Minister for Construction. She also held talks with the Environment Committee of the Parliament and members of the inter-agency Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group, comprised of UN agencies and non-governmental organizations.

On 14 October Ms. Wahlström visited Kungyangon in the Ayeyarwady Delta to assess progress made since Cyclone Nargis hit the region in May 2008, killing some 140,000 and affecting the lives of an estimated 2.4 million people. There she visited a cyclone resilient school and a village housing people displaced by the disaster and spoke with local communities on how to improve disaster preparedness and response.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The United Nations in Myanmar

Esben Q. Harboe, Special Assistant to the UN Resident Coordinator in Myanmar
Tel: +95 9 5074853, E-mail: esben.harboe@undp.org

Aye Win, National Information Officer, UNIC Yangon
Tel: +95 9 5123952, E-mail: aye.win@undp.org

United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR)

Brigitte Leoni, Regional Communication Officer, Asia Pacific Office, Bangkok, Thailand
Tel: +66 2 882766, E-mail: leonib@un.org