

PRESS RELEASE

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HAITIAN EARTHQUAKE BOOSTED GLOBAL COMMITMENT TO DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

GENEVA, 12 January 2012 – On the occasion of the two-year commemoration of the Haitian earthquake today, the UN Secretary General’s Special Representative on Disaster Risk Reduction, Margareta Wahlström, recognized the significant progress made over the last two years in dealing with the consequences of the disaster which took over 220,000 lives and left hundreds of thousands homeless. She issued the following statement:

“The resilience of the Haitian people over the last two years has been heroic as they seek to recover from a disaster of enormous magnitude. They have accomplished much in their efforts to re-build their country and re-house their people while also coping with other calamities including cyclones and an on-going cholera epidemic.

“While much has been accomplished, more needs to be done to absorb the lessons from this terrible tragedy. UNISDR invites the new Government to give priority to the issue of disaster risk reduction and also urges the donor community to maintain support to the Haitian Government’s efforts in this area. Recent successful initiatives such as a UN and EC supported seismic resilience programme in the northern region of Cap Haitian and a national simulation exercise at the start of the hurricane season last year need to be expanded on.

“The tragedy helped to create a greater global understanding of the importance of disaster risk reduction in contexts of rapid urbanization, seismic risk, population growth and widespread poverty. It confirmed that the authorities need to take the subject of risk reduction seriously, even in cities and regions that may not have experienced earthquakes or related tsunamis for hundreds of years. The UN is adapting its approaches to assessing risk to natural hazards to ensure that such potentially devastating events are better understood.

“Encouragingly, the numbers of countries reporting on their implementation of the international blue-print for disaster risk reduction, the *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters* is now over 130. Many of them are applying the lessons learned from Haiti.

“I look forward to visiting Haiti in March and discussing with the new government how the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, UNISDR, can support existing initiatives in the country and contribute to making disaster risk reduction a national development priority.”

About UNISDR

UNISDR is the UN office dedicated to disaster risk reduction. It is led by the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Disaster Risk Reduction and supports implementation of the *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters* which has been adopted by 168 countries and seeks “the substantial reduction of disaster losses, in

lives and in the social, economic and environmental assets of communities and countries.” Over 130 countries now report on their disaster risk reduction efforts. The biennial Third Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction took place in May 2011 and was opened by the UN Secretary General. It attracted several Heads of State and over 2,600 delegates representing 168 governments, 25 inter-governmental organizations, 65 NGOs and other ISDR partners. UNISDR has facilitated the creation of 38 National Disaster Data Bases around the world as part of its on-going global effort to lead and convince governments and the private sector to invest in risk reduction and avoid recurrent disaster losses which waste development resources. It has also mobilised over 1,000 cities and local governments to take part in the World Disaster Risk Reduction Campaign, *Making Cities Resilient: My City is Getting Ready!* In early 2011, UNISDR supported the initiative by the President of the UN General Assembly to organize the first thematic debate on disaster risk reduction ever held in the UN General Assembly.

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