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## DISASTER RISK FOLLOWING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS IN THAILAND SAYS UNISDR CHIEF

**BANGKOK, 23 January 2012** – The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, Margareta Wahlström, met today with Thailand's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance, Kittiratt Na-Ranong, to discuss new government proposals on risk management and to urge Government support for business continuity plans following the costliest disaster in the country's history.

The cost of the severe floods which hit Bangkok last month is estimated at \$40 billion. More than 1,000 factories were shut down and 700,000 people were out of work. Over 800 people died in the floods.

Following her meeting with the Minister for Finance, Special Representative Wahlström who also heads the UN office for disaster risk reduction, UNISDR, said: "In each of the last two years 15% to 16% of Thailand's population has been affected by disasters, mainly floods. I welcome the details of the government's plan to mitigate future flooding, including a re-forestation programme and improved procedures around the release of water from hydro-electric dams.

"What we have clearly seen now is that disaster risk is following economic development pathways in Thailand as it is in many other parts of the world. I appreciate from my meetings with the Government, private business people and the Chamber of Commerce that the sheer scale of the economic losses provides an opportunity for a major re-think about the role of risk management and disaster risk reduction in preventing a recurrence of this type of disaster.

Special Representative Wahlström visited the ancient site of Ayutthaya and met with representatives of the Fine Arts Department who explained that flood defences were insufficient to protect the heritage site. She said: "It is important for future generations that the protection of heritage is included in the overall national water and flood management plan. Climate change and increased weather variability means that we can expect more floods and we need to be prepared."

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### **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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