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## EMPOWER WOMEN AND GIRLS IN FIGHT AGAINST DISASTERS SAYS UNISDR

**GENEVA, 8 March 2012** – The UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction, Margareta Wahlström, marked International Women’s Day today with a call to governments in the world’s most disaster-prone countries to “empower girls and women through education and access to resources as part of building resilience to disasters at community level.

“Progress is being made in reaching the Millennium Development Goal of universal access to primary education but women still make up over two-thirds of the world’s 796 million people who are illiterate. We are handicapping ourselves in the fight against hunger and disasters if women are not given full access to basic schooling.

“This year’s focus for International Women’s Day is ‘*Empower Rural Women- End Hunger*’ and this cannot be achieved until we dismantle the barriers which prevent women from contributing fully to the economic life of their communities and being fully involved in disaster management.

“Rural women are the backbone of agricultural labour, the main care-givers in the home and often the head of the household yet they are discriminated against when it comes to education, access to information about climate change and hazards in their communities, and social norms often deny them basic life-saving skills such as learning how to read and write, how to swim or how to climb out of harm’s way.

“Women’s lives are put in danger because they are treated like second-class citizens in some of the most hazard-prone regions of the world. There is strong evidence to suggest that women are more likely to die in disasters than men and it is often because they are denied access to basic information about disaster risk and inhibited by social norms from escaping the home or work-place in time to avoid death.

“One of the greatest contributions we can make to climate change adaptation is to empower rural women and ensure their full involvement in the life of their communities especially when it comes to disaster management.”

### **About UNISDR**

UNISDR is the UN Office for 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 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 almost 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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