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## JAPAN'S SUCCESS IN RISK REDUCTION HIGHLIGHTED ON MARCH 11 ANNIVERSARY

**GENEVA, 9 March 2012** – The UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction, Margareta Wahlström, today paid tribute to the resilience of the Japanese people as they prepare to mark the first anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami.

She said: "One of the great learnings from the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami which can be applied in many other disaster-prone countries is the absolute importance of preparing populations at risk for the worst-case scenario. Mental preparation is just as important as physical protection. It is also vital to keep alive the historical memory of past events.

"Japan excels when it comes to public awareness of risks, evacuation drills and mobilising the population in a way that few other countries can emulate. We are aware of examples of where schoolchildren seized the initiative and escaped the tsunami while also helping younger children to flee.

"There can be no doubt that the toll of 15,854 killed and 3,203 missing would have been much higher among the 600,000 or more people at immediate risk in the affected areas if people had not responded to the early warnings. Let us not forget this great achievement when discussing all the other things that could have been done better.

"A recent survey of 82 countries by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, UNISDR, shows that less than 20% of countries committed to implementing the Hyogo Framework, the international blueprint for disaster risk reduction, have reported substantial progress on generating public awareness of risks and of how to address them. Good overall progress is being made on disaster management but it is clear that more emphasis needs to be placed on raising public awareness and instilling the right reflexes in people when disaster is imminent so they get out of harm's way in good time."

### **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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