

Press release

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GLOBAL DISASTERS EVENT OPENS WITH CONDOLENCES FOR OKLAHOMA CITY TORNADO VICTIMS

21 May 2013, GENEVA – A global gathering which will prove critical for the future of reducing risk from disasters opened to a record attendance today with many expressions of sympathy to the people of Oklahoma City over the loss of life caused yesterday by a deadly tornado that damaged schools and took many lives including those of at least 20 school children.

Speaking at the opening of the 4th Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, the President of Switzerland, Ueli Maurer, extended his country's condolences to the victims of the tornado in Oklahoma City and said that disasters were of concern to everyone, no matter where they occurred.

UN Deputy Secretary-General, Jan Eliasson, said: "Disaster risk reduction is essential to reach the Millennium Development Goals. There can be no sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation if water sources and latrines are vulnerable to natural hazards. Hospitals and other community structures must be resilient. It is not acceptable that so many people die in disasters because of shoddy building standards."

He urged conference participants to build on the achievements of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) – the existing global agreement on disaster risk reduction - and to address the gaps and challenges in the creation of the HFA2. The Global Platform is an opportunity to build consensus ahead of the 2015 World Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction. Over 40 consultations have already taken place on the HFA2.

Declaring the conference open, Mr. Martin Dahinden, Director-General of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, told the packed conference centre: "This coming together of such a tremendous wealth of expert knowledge and experience sets the stage to further reduce disaster losses of lives and social, economic and environmental assets in communities and countries."

Some 4,800 have registered to attend the Global Platform – organized by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction - including delegates from 165 governments, 130 academic institutions, 209 NGOs and 67 private sector companies.

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 seeks "the substantial reduction of disaster losses, in lives and in the social, economic and environmental assets of communities and countries."

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