

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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**MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR DISASTER REDUCTION
13 October 2013**

“Persons with disabilities are the biggest untapped resource for disaster planners around the world.” These are the words of Firoz Ali Alizada, a double amputee from Afghanistan who responded to a United Nations survey which uncovered scores of stories that speak to the ingenuity and drive of persons with disabilities to manage risk from disasters.

More than one billion persons in the world live with a disability. This year’s commemoration of the International Day for Disaster Reduction is an opportunity to recognize their vital role in fostering resilience.

Unfortunately, most persons with disabilities have never participated in disaster risk management or related planning and decision making processes. They suffer disproportionately high levels of disaster-related mortality and injuries.

Early warning systems, public awareness campaigns and other responses often fail to consider the needs of persons with disabilities, putting them at an unnecessarily elevated risk and sending a harmful message of inequality.

We can change this situation by including persons with disabilities in disaster resilience initiatives and policy planning. The recent General Assembly High-level Meeting on Disability and Development recognized the urgent need for action on this issue, which is also addressed in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Inclusion saves lives. And it empowers persons with disabilities to take ownership of their own safety – and that of their community.

We can already see their potential contribution in the many persons with visible and invisible disabilities around the world who already serve as volunteers and workers helping communities when disaster hits to cope and bounce back.

On the International Day for Disaster Reduction, let us resolve to do everything possible to ensure that all persons with disabilities have the highest possible levels of safety and the greatest possible chance to contribute to the overall wellbeing of society. Let us build an inclusive world where persons with disabilities can play an even greater role as resourceful agents of change.