

PRESS RELEASE

Including persons with disabilities at every stage of the disaster risk management builds stronger resilience, UN says

Cairo, 22nd October 2013.- The UN office for disaster risk reduction (UNISDR) – Regional Office for Arab States, and the World Health Organization (WHO) – Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean celebrated today the International Disaster Reduction Day in Cairo with a call for people living with disabilities to be empowered and engaged in disaster risk reduction as one the groups which face higher risks when a disaster occurs.

This year the International Day for Disaster Reduction on 13 October has turned its focus on highlighting the key contributions that people living with any form of disability can provide to help reduce the risk of disasters in their communities and build resilient societies.

In an event celebrated at the WHO premises in Cairo Mr. Amjad Abbashar, Head of the UNISDR Regional Office for Arab states, said: *“Including the needs of persons living with disabilities in disaster risk reduction is critical for the benefit of the community as a whole.”*

“People living with disabilities should be consulted and included in all stages of disaster risk management so their needs but also their contributions are not overlooked when preparing for and responding to disasters”, Mr. Amjad Abbashar added.

According to WHO, over a billion people, about 15% of the world's population, are estimated to live with some form of disability and more people will acquire a disability at some time in their life because of physical injury, disease or ageing. However, persons with disabilities are rarely thought of as possible contributors to the communities and therefore are not usually included in either disaster planning or recovery projects.

“Persons living with disabilities are in a unique position to contribute to disaster management initiatives by identifying challenges and possible solutions based on their own needs and experiences. They can play a significant role in both helping their communities recover from disasters, as well as providing valuable input to disaster risk reduction plans” said Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requires that persons with disabilities benefit from and participate in disaster relief, emergency response and disaster risk reduction strategies.

In that regard, a Joint UN Statement on Disability and Disasters that was released today to the media highlighted the need to include persons with disabilities *“in all policies and programmes”* aimed at addressing disaster risk reduction and humanitarian situations in order to achieve the same level of safety for all.

The statement read: “Persons living with disabilities often face higher risks when a disaster occurs and usually make up a large proportion of the casualties during a humanitarian crisis. Not only are they less likely to receive the aid they need, they are also less likely to recover in the long-term”. “Their lack of representation increases their vulnerability and that of their families, which consequently affects the resilience of communities as a whole”, the UN Joint statement stated.

Given the lack of data on disability issues generally, UNISDR launched world-wide this August the first-ever survey of people living with disabilities and disasters. The survey aims to collect information on the specific needs of persons living with disabilities and how they cope with disasters. For more information about the survey please visit:
<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/IDDR-2013-ARABIC>

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.”

For more information: www.unisdr.org / www.unisdr.org/arabstates

About WHO

In the 21st century, health is a shared responsibility, involving equitable access to essential care and collective defence against transnational threats. WHO is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system. It is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries and monitoring and assessing health trends.

For more information: www.emro.who.int/ www.who.int

For media inquires:

UNISDR in Cairo: Berta Acero, Communication Officer, email: acero@un.org, 0224535638

WHO in Cairo:

