

## Press release

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# THE VOLCANO THAT CHANGED THE COURSE OF DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT

**13 November 2015, GENEVA** – The head of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), Margareta Wahlström, today described the eruption of the Nevado del Ruiz volcano which claimed 25,000 lives in Colombia on November 13, 1985, as “a major turning point in the history of disaster risk management.”

In a statement to mark the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Ms. Wahlström said: “The tragic failure to evacuate the towns of Armero, Chinchina and surrounding villages despite multiple warnings of volcanic activity led to an enormous loss of life and our sympathies today lie with the survivors and those families who lost loved ones in the terrible events that ensued from the eruption.

“This catastrophe marked a turning point in Colombia and saw the introduction in 1989 of the National System for the Prevention of Disasters which represented an ambitious reform of disaster risk management in Colombia because the new policy not only embraced improved disaster management but also disaster risk reduction as a policy goal.

“It introduced an innovative systems approach to risk governance: integrated horizontally across government ministries and departments, vertically across regional and local governments and with specified roles for scientific and technical institutions, the Red Cross and other non-governmental organisations.

“This is a model that is still valid today as we encourage Member States of the UN to implement the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction adopted in March this year which emphasises the importance of a paradigm shift from disaster management to disaster risk management in an era when extreme weather events are on the rise and economic losses from disasters are escalating.

“The lesson from Colombia is that we need governments to take responsibility for early warnings and other elements of disaster risk management and to avoid the creation of risk in their planning and development activity if we are to succeed in getting substantial reductions in mortality, the numbers of people affected and economic losses from disasters.”

**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 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 which seeks “the substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses, in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries.”