



World Conference on Disaster Reduction

18-22 January 2005, Kobe, Hyogo, Japan

United Nations - Nations Unies

Secretariat for the World Conference on Disaster Reduction – Secrétariat de la Conférence mondiale pour la prévention des catastrophes

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Bam : One Year After

A lesson learned on building reinforcement

“ Earthquakes don’t kill people, buildings do” said Charles Richter, inventor of the Richter scale of earthquake magnitude measurement. On 26 December 2003, a devastating earthquake struck the ancient Iranian city of Bam. Just four days before another earthquake of the same magnitude hit San Robles, California. More than 26,000 people were killed in Bam, just two people died in California. The majority of those who died in Iran were crushed to death by falling rubble in their homes. Despite the frequent occurrence of deadly quakes in Iran, no building reinforcement codes existed and many houses built out of mud bricks did not stand up to the effects of the earthquake. In addition to the massive loss of life, some 80 per cent of the buildings in Bam were destroyed in 12 seconds.

One year after this tragedy, the reconstruction process is slow and most of city’s inhabitants are still living under tents and provisional shelters. The Iranian Government has since hosted a number of conferences bringing together earthquake experts and has expressed its will to construct new buildings which would be resilient to another disaster. Some lessons have been learned but the results are still falling short of what is needed to build a safer environment

“ Decision makers begin to understand that to save lives, they have to adopt an integrated, comprehensive and multi-hazard strategy for disaster risk reduction. This strategy includes prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery and rehabilitation”, says Salvano Briceño, Director of UN International strategy for Disaster Reduction. “They need to pay particular attention to essential buildings and infrastructures, such as schools and hospitals which are key infrastructures when an earthquake strikes. Architects, mayors, local and regional land planners have to work hand in hand to reduce vulnerability and to design safer earthquakes buildings. We have to act before the disaster happens, not only after it happened. ”

These issues will be discussed at the Word Conference on Disaster Reduction that will take place in Kobe, Japan next month (18 to 22 January 2005) and a plan of action will be adopted for the next ten years. “ Kobe is a formidable opportunity to exchange expertice and experiences and to ultimately save lives and make a safer world”, says Mr. Briceño.

More than 2,000 people from over 150 countries will be present at the World Conference, many of whom will be coming from disaster-prone communities to share their own experiences and ideas.

For more information please contact:

Brigitte Leoni, Media Relations

World Conference on Disaster Reduction, Inter.-Agency Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR), Tel: + 41 22 917 49 68 / +33 (0) 6 26 37 88 61, E-mil: leonib@un.org



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