



International Strategy for Disaster Reduction -

PRESS RELEASE

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CUBA : A MODEL IN HURRICANE RISK MANAGEMENT

As Ivan stormed across the Caribbean, the United Nations stated that Cuba was a model in hurricane risk management in developing countries. "The Cuban way could easily be applied to other countries with similar economic conditions and even in countries with greater resources that do not manage to protect their population as well as Cuba does" explained Salvano Briceno, director of the ISDR secretariat in Geneva, the UN body that focuses on disaster reduction.

Figures speak for themselves: only 4 people were killed when Hurricane Georges hit Cuba in 1998, by far less than the approximately 600 killed in other countries in the region, with similar or better economic conditions. More recently, hurricane Charley killed 4 people in Cuba and 30 people in Florida.

"Many reasons can explain the low level of hurricane mortality rate in Cuba compared to its neighbours. Education is possibly the main one, said Briceno. Disaster preparedness, prevention and response are part of the general education curriculum. People in schools, universities and workplaces are continuously informed and trained to cope with natural hazards. From their early age, all Cubans are taught how to behave as hurricanes approach the island. They also have, every year, a two-day training session in risk reduction for hurricanes, complete with simulation exercises and concrete preparation actions. This facilitates the mobilization of their communities at the local level when a hurricane hits Cuba."

Civil Defence and the Meteorological Institute are two other pillars of the Cuban hurricane risk management system. Everyone knows how to interpret the information given by the Cuban Institute of Meteorology. TV and radio play a vital role in informing the public as the level of alert rises. All institutions are mobilized 48 hours before the hurricane is foreseen to hit the island, to implement the emergency plan, and measures such as massive evacuation are taken.

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Every individual has a role to play at the community level. Local authorities know who needs special care and how to assist the most vulnerable. Schools and hospitals are converted into shelters and transport is immediately organized.

Cuba is an example that the vulnerability of people can effectively be reduced with low-cost measures – and strong determination. “Authorities are determined to implement disaster reduction policies in Cuba, says Briceno. It is part of their development planning and their culture, which play a key role in saving lives and livelihoods. This illustrates the importance of a strong political will -- one of the main issues that will be discussed at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction. Leaders of countries around the world have at their disposal the knowledge needed to reduce risk and vulnerability to hazards. Even poor countries are not entirely without options to mitigate or prevent the consequences of hazards. What is often lacking are concrete programmes of action and the political will to implement policies and measures.”

The World Conference on Disaster Reduction (WCDR) will be held under the auspices of the United Nations in Kobe, Hyogo (Japan), from 18 to 22 January 2005.

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