



PRESS RELEASE

UN/ISDR 2004/06
16 September 2004

254 million people affected by natural hazards in 2003 Figures on the rise

The natural hazards that are badly affecting countries as diverse as China, Bangladesh, France and the United Kingdom demonstrate that countries usually well prepared to prevent disasters are suffering huge losses in lives and livelihood. This illustrates a trend that many UN agencies and experts who work on disaster reduction have observed for some time now. Not only is the world globally facing more potential disasters, but increasing numbers of people are becoming more vulnerable to hazards. This is alarming.

According to the latest figures given by Professor Debarati Guha Sapis, from the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) at the University of Louvain, Belgium, over 254 million people were affected by natural hazards in 2003, an increase of 180 per cent compared to 1990 (90 million people).

"People are becoming increasingly vulnerable because greater numbers are compelled to live in high-risk urban areas when looking for better economic opportunities" says Sálvano Briceño, director of UN/ISDR, the UN secretariat in Geneva that focuses on disaster reduction. "The lack of facilities, schools, health centres in rural areas drives many individuals to move to urban slums or areas that are of great risk. Urban migrants settle in exposed stretches of land either on seismic faults, flooding plains or on landslide prone slopes. The urban concentration, the effects of climate change and the environmental degradation are greatly increasing vulnerability. Alarming, this is getting worse".

For more information, please contact:

Brigitte Leoni, Media Relations

Inter-agency secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR)

Tel: +41 22 917 4968

Email: leonib@un.org

www.unisdr.org

PRESS RELEASE

“In the past few years, humanitarian response to disasters has significantly brought down the number of deaths but disasters cannot be measured only in terms of fatal casualties” explains Briceño. “Increasing numbers of people are injured, lose their livelihoods and jobs, have their home destroyed after disaster has struck. We won’t ever stop natural hazards, but the world needs to find better ways to cope with disasters. Development programmes, including education, land use planning and environmental management can reduce the vulnerability of populations”.

According to a new report from UN-Habitat, two billion people will live in slums by 2020, and over 5 billion people will live in cities by 2025, mainly in the developing world. Approximately 70 cities out of the 100 larger ones in the world are located in risk prone areas. If hazard strikes any of those cities, the potential for disasters could be huge. National governments, regional authorities, local communities need to be prepared to contain such risks.

The UN is convening a World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Hyogo (Japan) from 18 to 22 January 2005. It will be an opportunity to explore such issues in depth: vulnerability reduction is the only way to reduce risk and save lives and livelihoods.

A thirty-year review of world disaster statistics will be released in October by CRED. The report looks into trends over time of different types of disasters and makes projections for the future. It also covers disaster losses and costs and preferences of donors for aid. For further information, contact Regina Below on +32 2 764 3327/3326 or below@epid.ucl.ac.be

The World Disasters Report made by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies will be presented to the press on 28 October 2004.

For more information, please contact:

Brigitte Leoni, Media Relations

Inter-agency secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR)

Tel: +41 22 917 4968

Email: leonib@un.org

www.unisdr.org