



World Conference on Disaster Reduction
18-22 January 2005, Kobe, Hyogo, Japan

PRESS RELEASE

UN/ISDR 2005/4
19 January 2005

Global Early Warning System Launched at Conference on Disaster Reduction

Kobe, Hyogo, Japan - - United Nations experts have decided to create a global early warning system to reduce the impact of natural hazards on vulnerable communities and to increase international cooperation to help save lives and livelihoods.

Launched today at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, the International Early Warning Programme (IEWP) brings together United Nations organizations including the World Meteorological Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the World Food Programme, and the United Nations Environment Programme, the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and the ISDR Platform for the Promotion of Early Warning, together with the German Disaster Reduction Committee, and other organizations.

The IEWP, which was proposed at the Second International Conference on Early Warning in Bonn, Germany two years ago, will improve resilience to all types of natural hazards including droughts, wildland fires, floods, typhoons, hurricanes, landslides, volcanic eruption and tsunamis. "This new programme will help bring safety, security and peace of mind. Millions of people worldwide owe their lives and livelihoods to effective early warnings systems", said Sálvano Briceno, Director of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction at today's launch.

This UN initiative will include wider information flow and emphasize the importance of community education about disaster preparedness. "An effective warning system can exist only through regional cooperation that respects the principle of open, free and unrestricted exchange of observational data and ensures the establishment of an effective response plan that is activated when warnings are issued", said Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO.

"It is increasingly clear that we need a multi-hazard early warning system that should represent a new way of thinking that and ensures environmental stability factors based on local wisdom and knowledge, are built into disaster plans", said Klaus Töpfer, UNEP Executive Director.



International Strategy
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Effective early warning systems have been widely recognized as worthwhile and necessary investments. Such systems, coupled with humanitarian aid and better preparedness, have hugely cut the number of people dying from famine, saving two million lives over the last twenty years.

In 2004, millions of people in the Americas and Asia were evacuated when tropical storms struck undoubtedly saving thousands of lives. Experts agree that the lack of comparable early warning system in the Indian Ocean was a factor in the huge loss of life there from the 26 December 2004 tsunami.

”One third of more than one hundred million people whom WFP assists are those affected by natural hazards, said James T. Morris, Executive Director of the WFP, whose agency has given priority to early warning and preparedness. WFP has also developed the HEWSweb (The Humanitarian Early Warning Service) which was launched on the eve of the Kobe Conference, in December in Geneva. HEWSweb is a new early warning website bringing together under one web platform the vast amount of information available from technical institutions on each type of natural hazards.

In a statement at the global conference, Michel Jarraud, Secretary-General of WMO, said “about 90 per cent of all natural disasters are disasters of meteorological or hydrological origin. WMO aims to halve the number of deaths due to water-related disasters over the next 15 years by improving alerting systems for weather and water events through risk assessment, hazard detection, awareness raising and education about disaster prevention of communities at risk; capacity building in developing countries; and the allotment of a portion of development assistance to disaster prevention strategies”.



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