



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

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nations call for safer hospitals and schools to prepare for disasters

Kobe, Hyogo, Japan - - "We have to make sure that key urban functions in every community are able to withstand the shocks of natural disasters when they strike. When hospitals are destroyed it is impossible to care for the wounded; when schools are damaged, our future generation is at risk", said Sálvano Briceno, Director of the Secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction. "Hospitals and schools need to be multi-hazard resistant to avoid double disaster from occurring", he added.

Protecting and strengthening vital social services has been among the main issues being discussed here. Conference participants are calling on governments to protect and strengthen critical public facilities and physical infrastructure, particularly schools, hospitals, communications and disaster warning centres.

"What is the point of preparing people for disasters when hospitals aren't prepared and often collapse killing people during disasters", said Jean-Luc Poncelet of the Pan American Health Organization. When the powerful earthquake struck Bam, Iran, just over a year ago, all the main hospitals were damaged and not able to provide basic social services.

Children are among the most vulnerable targets when natural hazards occur. Thousands of school children were among the 220,000 victims of last month's Indian Ocean tsunami and thousands more have perished in floods, earthquakes and hurricanes across the globe.

"Within five years we would like to see a number of countries having integrated a culture of disaster prevention in their schools and for the schools themselves to be disaster resilient", said Rouhban Badaoui of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Disaster experts acknowledge that schools within a community are viewed as model facilities which illustrate the degree to which those communities are prepared for natural hazards.



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The outcome document of the World Conference, to be adopted at its closing session tomorrow, will include a commitment for countries to ensure that hospitals and schools are safe from disaster by 2015. This will include retrofitting hospitals and school buildings to withstand the shocks of natural hazards and ensuring that all new hospitals are multi-hazard resistant. “Making this a reality is not just a question of money but also political will; all sectors of society need to be involved, including communication, transport, gas and water plants”, said Mr. Poncelet.

Building disaster-resilient communities is one of the biggest challenges facing the international community. The commitments reached here aim to realize this goal so as to pave the way for a more sustainable future.

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