



PRESS RELEASE

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26 DECEMBER TSUNAMI PROVOKES HIGH JUMP IN DISASTER DEATH FIGURES

More than 320,000 people perished last year in 366 natural disasters, according to figures announced today in Geneva by the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) based in Brussels. The number of deaths is still provisional as the death toll for the December Tsunami in the Indian Ocean is not yet definitive. "2004 was a killer year because of the tsunami which took the lives of around 300,000 people out of the 320,000 total people killed by natural disasters. Without the tsunami, a dramatically exceptional event, the general trend which shows a decrease in the number of deaths would have been confirmed," says Professor Debarati Guha-Sapir of CRED.

The number of affected people by natural disasters is nevertheless lower than the previous year. In 2004, more than 139 million people were affected by natural disasters, significantly less than the 254 million people affected by disasters in 2003.

"The 2004 figures reflect what has been observed for many years. More than two thirds of the natural disasters are caused by hydro-meteorological events such as windstorms, floods, typhoons and hurricanes", says Salvano Briceño, Director of the ISDR secretariat, the Geneva-based UN body that deals with disaster reduction. "That is why it is urgent to pay particular attention to such types of disasters. They will be more frequent and severe in the future, causing enormous destruction, with long-term consequences on populations."

In 2004, weather-related events caused 12,200 deaths and affected 116 million people. The other big threat is drought that affected more than 17 million people in the same year. "Despite the number of affected people being lower than in 2003, human and social vulnerability is still worrying" says Salvano Briceño. "States, corporations and donor agencies urgently need to take into account this vulnerability in their economic strategies and incorporate local capacity for self protection."

"Overall the investment in preparedness and prevention paid off by reducing the human impact of disasters. However, there are still high vulnerability spots that need urgent attention" adds Professor Debarati Guha-Sapir of CRED.

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