



International Strategy for Disaster Reduction -
Stratégie internationale pour la prévention des

PRESS RELEASE

UN/ISDR 2005/33
Thursday 3 October 2005

**British schoolgirl hero meets President Clinton:
“All children should know what a tsunami is... and how to react ” says
Tilly Smith**

Over the past two years, a record number of people have been killed in disasters across the world. As we approach the anniversary of the 26 December tsunami in the Indian Ocean, the evidence is clear that education can dramatically reduce this human toll.

A young English survivor of the Indian Ocean disaster brought this message to the United Nations in New York today. Tilly Smith, an eleven year old schoolgirl was on holiday in Thailand with her family when the tsunami hit. She recognized the signs of the receding sea and warned her parents of the impending tsunami, which led to hotel guests being rapidly cleared from the beach.

President Clinton met with Tilly in his capacity as the United Nations Special Envoy for the Tsunami Recovery.

“Tilly’s story tells us about the importance of teaching young people about natural hazards” President Clinton said. “All children should be taught disaster reduction so they know what to do when natural hazards strike. Tilly’s story is a simple reminder that education can make a difference between life and death” he added.

Tilly had learnt about tsunamis in a school geography lesson just two weeks before going on holiday to Pukhet in Thailand.

“ My mum didn't realise what was happening on the beach because she wasn't taught about tsunamis when she was younger. She had never even heard the word “tsunami” and she didn't know how to react. I think it's really important for all kids to know about tsunamis and other type of natural hazards ”said Tilly Smith.

Tilly wanted to convey this message because she hopes her experience will help raise awareness about the importance of disaster education.

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 , New
York: +33-626 378 861, email: leonib@un.org or bjorkquist@un.org



International Strategy for Disaster Reduction -
Stratégie internationale pour la prévention des

PRESS RELEASE

“ When you have only a few minutes, it is important to know the actions you must take to reduce your risk, such as running to higher ground to avoid flood water. Many children have learnt to live with natural hazards in countries such as Japan, Cuba, Iran and Bangladesh. Everybody should have this basic knowledge,” says Salvano Briceño, Director of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) secretariat. ISDR and UNICEF have produced a boardgame called Riskland to help educate children on practical actions to take when disaster strike.

The United Nations has taken the opportunity of Tilly’s visit to New York to draw attention to the importance of making schools more resilient in disaster-prone countries and to integrate disaster risk reduction into school curricula.

During last month’s earthquake in India and Pakistan, scores of schools were destroyed and many children perished under the rubble. “ UNESCO, the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, the OECD and others have extensive expertise on school safety. We need to work together to reduce the impact of natural hazards on children,” says Salvano Briceño. “If we educate our children, there is hope that we can build a culture of prevention for future generations.”

UNIFEED Flash will have material available on this story.

For more information please contact: Paula Harrington, New York, (212) 963 74 58

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 , New York: +33-626 378 861, email: leonib@un.org or bjorkquist@un.org