

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **“ Building safety should become a priority in countries vulnerable to natural hazards ”**

The earthquake that struck Java, Indonesia on May 27 has directly affected thousands of children many of whom have been injured or are without shelter.

“ Children are always among the most vulnerable groups affected by disasters. They are often the first injured or killed and the ones who suffer most from the long-term consequences of disasters. Their homes and schools are destroyed and their lives are disrupted for months after the tragedy. Governments of countries vulnerable to natural hazards of this magnitude should invest more in building codes and land planning to reduce the loss of life and livelihoods,” says Salvano Briceño, Director of the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction secretariat.

Examples in Algeria, Afghanistan, Colombia, India, Turkey, and, Nepal show that the building code enforcement and the political commitment in constructing safe schools can offer many lessons learned to other countries at high seismic risk. “ We need to use this existing knowledge, expertise and resources to build hazard resistant buildings,” says Salvano Briceño.

Building safety is one of the key themes of UN/ISDR's World Disaster Reduction Campaign for 2006-2007. The campaign will be launched on 15 June in Paris with UNESCO and UN/ISDR 's main partners to raise awareness on the importance of better protecting children against disasters. “ Education on disaster risk reduction and building safety should become a priority in all vulnerable countries. It is proven that a 10 per cent investment in building reinforcement can reduce the amount of casualties during disasters” adds Salvano Briceño.

In Bantul, the worst affected region, 80 per cent of homes were damaged and over 23,000 buildings around the city of Yogyakarta were reduced to rubble.

Java is one of the most populated islands of Indonesia and highly prone to earthquakes and volcanic activity. Indonesia sits on the Asia-Pacific's so-called "Ring of Fire" marked by heavy volcanic and tectonic activity.

Saturday's quake was the third major tremor to hit Indonesia in 18 months. The worst, the Dec. 26, 2004 quake and its resulting tsunami, left more than 200,000 people dead across the Indian Ocean region.