



PRESS RELEASE

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Global disaster reduction education campaign

“ Investing in school safety and disaster risk education pays off”

Paris, 15 June – A global campaign for disaster reduction education was launched at UNESCO’s Paris Headquarters today by Koïchiro Matsuura, UNESCO Director-General and Sálvano Briceño, Director of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction secretariat (ISDR). Also present at the event were several children who have lived through natural disasters, including the young English schoolgirl, Tilly Smith, whose saved many lives in Thailand in December 2004 thanks to a geography lesson about tsunamis.

The campaign, entitled “Disaster Risk Reduction Begins at School”, has two main objectives: to promote disaster reduction education in school curricula, and to improve school safety by encouraging the application of construction standards that can withstand any kind of natural hazard.

“Education and awareness raising provide the foundations for a culture of prevention. If people in places threatened by natural disasters were conscious of the risks, and knew how to protect themselves, there would be fewer deaths, fewer wounded and less destruction when such disasters strike.” Mr Matsuura said during his opening address at the launch.

More than 200 million people are affected every year by natural catastrophes and children under 18 are among the most vulnerable, especially if they are attending school at the time disaster strikes. “Investing in school safety and education pays off in the long term, ” said Salvano Briceño, Director of UN/ISDR..

Last March, 160 schools were destroyed during an earthquake in Iran and more than 200 school children perished in the Philippines after a mudslide covered their school.



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Of the nations reporting to the UN/ISDR before January 2005, only 33 of 82 claimed to have disaster-related subjects in their national primary/secondary school curricula. In Mexico, Romania and New Zealand, teaching of disaster-related subjects is mandatory. Other countries such as Brazil, Venezuela, Cuba and Japan report significant primary and secondary teaching at municipal or state level.

“Many countries are already drawing the lessons of past disasters and taking measures to improve the level of safety of their schools. We encourage every government in the world to include disaster reduction in the curricula of school children” Mr Briceño said.

The launch of the ISDR campaign took place during the International Symposium on “Progress and proposals regarding education for sustainable development” organized by the French National Committee for the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development in Paris, 14-16 June.

A B-Roll with the stories of Tilly and Anto, and a presentation of Cuba’s experience in hurricane risk prevention education will be available and transmitted by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) as from 14 June. A media information kit with the two DVDs will also be available.

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