

PRESS RELEASE

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More commitment needed to reduce the risk and impact of disasters

(New York: 10 October 2006): High level representatives of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR) secretariat, and Focus Humanitarian Assistance (FOCUS), an affiliate of the Aga Khan Development Network, today called on world leaders to strengthen commitments to reduce the risk of natural hazards and their impact on hundreds of millions of people in developing countries worldwide.

“This strengthened partnership is a ground-breaking initiative to make an impact and set a precedent to work on concrete mitigation measures that are needed by people who are most at risks and to make sure that no school in Pakistan is rebuilt unless it is safer or earthquake resistant,” said Jan Egeland, the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Meeting at the United Nations in New York, the officials agreed that more attention must be paid to “upstream” work to prepare communities at risk of natural disasters. As well, more is needed to be done to enable communities who might be affected by natural disasters to recover more quickly.

A study conducted by the World Bank and Columbia University shows that more than 3.4 billion people, half of the world’s population, are relatively highly exposed to at least one natural hazard. The study also showed that more than four-fifths of world GDP is located in areas subject to one or more hazards.

As an indication of what more could be done, the officials pointed to the new Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, established by the World Bank in partnership with ISDR. The facility, which has already received start-up funding from the World Bank and commitments of support from a variety of donor countries, will help low-and-middle income countries to mainstream disaster prevention policies in their national development strategies.

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The World Bank, through the Global Facility (GFDRR), will focus on 86 countries identified as prone to disasters.

“Our objective with this Facility,” said Katherine Sierra, Vice President of Sustainable Development at the World Bank, “is to work at two levels: globally, we will partner with the ISDR to produce and distribute best practice knowledge and information about disaster risk prevention and mitigation. As well, we will work with client countries as they foster their own country systems and capacities in order to mainstream disaster risk reduction and recovery in their own development planning and policies.”

WMO has already developed a strategic plan, built upon strong coordination and partnerships, to develop concrete national and regional projects, specifically designed to address gaps and needs in early warning systems.

Mr. Michel Jarraud, WMO Secretary-General said: "Disaster prevention and preparedness are essential for achieving the development goals, particularly in the least developed countries. WMO activities and programmes have resulted in significant scientific and technical advances in meteorology and hydrology allowing for a quantum leap forward in reducing loss of life, and property particularly through enhanced capacities for risk assessment and early warning systems. The challenge is to empower every community to apply these capacities in taking preventive actions. ISDR System provides a critical framework for collaborations and partnerships in achieving this goal."

Working within the Hyogo Framework for Action, FOCUS and the AKDN will continue to be actively engaged in promoting disaster risk reduction as an international, national and local priority.

"It is when we engage communities in their own protection that we truly find disaster resilience. It is to this end that Focus Humanitarian Assistance will continue to engage civil society organizations, the private sector and governments in public, private, community partnerships in disaster risk management" said Mr. Hadi Husani, Executive Officer, Focus Humanitarian Assistance USA

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Finally, the IFRC which is already a stronger supporter of the ISDR System, reiterated its full commitment to disaster risk reduction.

"We believe that by tackling vulnerability we can significantly reduce disaster risk. Our aim is to build safer and more resilient communities. We see examples of this commitment every day; Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers contribute to build safer and resilient communities through community mobilization and mitigation initiatives. We fully support the aspirations of the Hyogo Framework for Action and believe that the ISDR System will help us to collectively make a difference", said Johan Schaarm, International Federation Special Representative for the tsunami.

All these organizations will work closely with the ISDR secretariat and prepare, together with the UNDP a plan of action that will be announced at the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction next June in Geneva.

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