

International Strategy for Disaster Reduction

PRESS RELEASE

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The ISDR is urging for more concerted action to better prepare vulnerable populations to the possible effects of climate changes

The recent floods in the Horn of Africa have affected more than 1.8 million people for the second time since last August where heavy rains and drought forced the same people to flee their homes. Scientists have predicted that events like these will become more common in the future.

“What is happening in Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia is a call for more concerted action to better prepare populations to the negative impacts of climate changes. The world is facing a new responsibility to protect the most vulnerable populations to floods and other weather-related disasters. There is a lot of knowledge about what can be done to reduce flood impacts. This knowledge needs to be shared and applied to reduce the suffering of people,” said Salvano Briceño, Director of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction secretariat. “Bangladesh is a good example of what a country can achieve to reduce its vulnerability to floods.”

Bangladesh has developed an effective early warning system, and has invested in preparing its population to evacuate and to adopt land-planning practices, that reduce the impact of floods. Bangladesh’s Flood Forecasting and Warning System (FFWS), established in the 1970s now covers all the flood prone areas of the country and provides early warning flood information with a lead-time of 24 to 48 hours. Other mitigation measures such as mapping of high-risk areas and improvement of legislation to control developments in the flood plains and wetlands have also helped this country to reduce the amount of flood losses over the last decade.

Last week in Nairobi, government representatives and experts agreed on a five-year programme to establish how best to adapt to climate changes. A key element will be to explore the use of disaster reduction methods to cope with extreme conditions like floods and drought. The ISDR will be partnering with the Climate Convention secretariat in this initiative that will help reduce flood losses in the future. More governments committed to the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action are also taking measures that will contribute to reduce flood impacts.

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Floods have already affected almost 37 million people this year according to the Center for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) and account for 65 per cent of all disasters that occurred over the period January and June 2006.

According to the last CRED CRUNCH, October 2006 an interesting point to note about the first semester of 2006 is the significant number of recorded flood disasters, with a total of 113 floods representing all-time high of 65% of all natural disasters. The first semester average for the preceding 10 years was of 58 floods, representing an average of only 36.5% of all natural hazards. In fact, floods constitute an increasingly large proportion of all disasters recorded in the EM-DAT database over the last 50 years.

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