



United Nations
International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
Secretariat, Geneva

For more information
please contact:

Brigitte Leoni
Media Relations
Tel: +41 22 917 8897
leonib@un.org
www.unisdr.org

PRESS RELEASE

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The UN/ISDR secretariat calls for urgent action to reduce vulnerability to climate change

“The world must act urgently to cut the risk from extreme weather events linked with climate change”, Salvano Briceño, Director of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction secretariat, said this morning on the publication of the fourth IPCC assessment report on climate change impacts, adaptation and vulnerability.

“Heat waves, droughts, storms and floods have devastating consequences on people and their livelihoods today. Not only will climate change-related dangers worsen, according to the IPCC, our vulnerability to these is increasing, as more people settle in hazardous areas. It is a recipe for disaster.”

The IPCC warned today that people will need to adapt to face the impact from the warming that is already unavoidable, due to past greenhouse gas emissions. It called for more extensive adaptation to reduce vulnerability to future climate change. Adaptation to current weather extremes can increase resilience to climate change, the full IPCC report also states. “Adaptation to climate change means, for example, setting up early warning systems that reach all people, protecting important infrastructures such as hospitals, schools and water supplies” Mr Briceño said.

The ISDR secretariat, which is the UN body for preventing disasters, urges governments to speed up implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action, adopted in 2005 by governments in Kobe, Japan. This framework aims at increasing the resilience of nations and communities to disasters by 2015. “The Hyogo Framework for Action offers a series of measures that can help,” said Mr Briceño. “Good governance; appropriate land-use planning and building codes; effective policies and budgets to reinforce key infrastructure, such as bridges, transports and drainage systems; early warning systems and preparedness programmes are prevention measures that will protect lives and assets if they are put in place systematically.”

The IPCC report released in Brussels today identifies the climate change impacts that will affect the various regions of the world, sectors of the world economy and systems. The hardest hit include the Arctic, sub Saharan Africa, small islands developing states, and Asian megadeltas, as well as coastal zones, water resources and human health. And it is the poorest who will suffer the most as they have the least means to adapt. The report foresees more urban flooding, landslides, heat waves and drought, which will affect the economies of many human settlements.

By 2030, two thirds of humanity will live in cities and more than two billion people will live in slums, according to UN Habitat. Climate-related hazards will increase the vulnerabilities of the poor, already the most affected by disasters. Poor people often live in high-risk areas such as slopes, flood plains and ravines,

which are prone to landslides and floods. “Climate change is not the only stress on human settlements: it will feed back into other stresses, such as environmental degradation and rapid urbanization, which in turn will create more disasters,” says Salvano Briceño.

Many countries have taken steps to face those new challenges. After the terrible floods of 2000, Mozambique invested substantially in early warning systems, preparedness and flood management and is now encountering fewer losses when floods occur. Similarly, new warning systems and evacuation procedures in Andhra Pradesh, India, have also reduced deaths from coastal tropical cyclones by 90 percent since 1977.

The first session of the Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction, which will take place in Geneva 5-7 June, will encourage countries and organizations to develop adaptation plans to climate variability and change. It will reiterate the need for immediate action by all stakeholders to decrease vulnerabilities, manage risk and reduce disaster risk, including climate-related disasters.

The next IPCC report, which will be released in May, will focus on measures to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change. Reducing greenhouse gases in turn reduces disaster risk.