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PRESS RELEASE

UN/ISDR 2007/06
April 17, 2007

Building Regional Partnerships for Reducing Disaster Risk in Middle East and North Africa

Ever increasing numbers of natural hazards (particularly as a result of earthquakes and floods) occur in the Middle Eastern and North African countries. More than 26,000 people were killed in 2003 in the Bam earthquake in Iran and another 2,200 died in the Boumerdes's earthquake in Algeria. Several hundred of people suffered from severe floods between 2004 and 2006 in Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria.

These trends represent a combination of increased number of hazards events, particularly floods, and an increased vulnerability. In the Middle East and North Africa region such trends are mostly the result of a combination of specific factors, amongst which the rapid population growth, increasing rates of urbanization, unplanned urban development and climate changes. However, despite the frequency, impact and recurrence of events, disaster response remains the predominant approach to disaster risk management in the MENA region.

"While efficient disaster response is important, it is not a long-term sustainable approach, particularly if considering that, by some estimates, the cost of recovery after major disasters globally has grown by 20 percent annually over the past two decades, with an impact for some countries in the order of 3 to 15 percent of their GDP", says Ayat Soliman, the Acting Country Manager for Egypt at the World Bank.

Within this regional backdrop and recognizing the important link between development and Disaster Risk Reduction, the World Bank in close partnership with ISDR and with the critical support of the Government of Arab Republic of Egypt are co-organising the first regional Disaster Risk Reduction workshop, titled **Building Partnerships for Natural Disaster Risk Reduction and Hazard Risk Management**, held in Cairo on April 18-21, 2007. The event is supported by funds from the newly created multi-donor Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) at the World Bank and is part of the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action agreed to at the UN Kobe World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2005.

The workshop is intended as the first step towards initiating long-term regional collaborations on issues of Natural Disaster Risk Reduction and Hazard Risk Management. Its main objectives is to take stock of the current status of disaster management systems across countries, promote an integrated approach to Disaster Risk Reduction and possibly encourage new synergies and partnerships between governments to better address disaster prevention. The workshop will also provide an opportunity to participants to discuss future needs and priorities to strengthen Disaster Risk Reduction in their respective countries and the region as a whole.

"Since the Kobe Conference, countries of the Middle East and North Africa have taken many practical measures to implement the Hyogo Framework for Action which is the key instrument to reduce the impact of disasters by 2015. They have acquired good national expertises that deserve to be shared regionally," says Salvano Briceño, director of the UN/ISDR secretariat.

“Cairo, Algiers and Teheran are fast growing cities that will become even more vulnerable to disasters because of climate change and rapid urbanisation impacts”, says Salvano Briceño. “ I hope that this first workshop will lead to more exchange of expertise and knowledge between countries. This is key if we want to save more people and their livelihoods against disasters”

For more statistics on the region, please consult the following link: “http://www.emdat.net/disasters/Visualisation/emdat_display_list.php”

For more information on the GFDRR at the World Bank, please consult the following link: www.worldbank.org/hazards/gfdr