



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

UN/ISDR 2007/12
October 5, 2007

2007 UN Sasakawa Award selects two Laureates dedicated to communicating lessons of past disasters

Professor Yoshiaki Kawata from the Disaster Prevention Research Institute in Japan, and Tony Gibbs, a highly respected Caribbean engineer in building safety, have been selected as the two 2007 Sasakawa Laureates.

Professor Kawata, a prominent professor in the field of disaster risk reduction at Kyoto University, was awarded for his promotion of research and knowledge about past disasters. In particular he has highlighted the bitter lessons learned from the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake (Kobe) which killed more than 6400 people and is considered one of the most dramatic and costly earthquakes in Japan's history.

Professor Kawata has devoted most of his past 30 years to increasing people's awareness of disasters through scientific research, engineering practice, and education. In 2002 he founded the Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution and established a museum to educate not only the public at large but also local governments in the latest practical knowledge and skills in disaster reduction. The Kobe Disaster Reduction Museum attracts thousands of people every year from all over the world.

Jointly receiving the Sasakawa Laureate Award is Tony Gibbs, a national of Grenada and Barbados who is an advisor to the UN and Panamerican Health Organisation (PAHO WHO) Disaster Mitigation Advisory Group on hospital safety. A pioneer in promoting safe architectural and engineering designs resistant to natural hazards, Mr Gibbs has made a significant contribution to hazard awareness and disaster risk reduction in the Caribbean and throughout the Americas, particularly in the field of hospital safety.

Struck by the number of hospitals destroyed after every hurricane season, he focused on designing structures that could better protect hospitals against wind and earthquakes. His innovative work has significantly influenced standards and advances in building design in projects all over the world.

Mr Gibbs is also being awarded for his advocacy and leadership role in sharing his knowledge with engineers, architects, builders and the general public.

“The award recognizes the efforts of these individuals, - both trained as engineers - to communicate effectively on hazard and risk related issues with a wide range of stakeholders including social scientists, engineers, architects and decision makers as well as the general public,” says Salvano Briceño, director of the ISDR secretariat. “Their ability to bridge the gaps between science and practice has brought disaster risk reduction closer to people’s daily lives.”

In addition to the two main Laureates, one Sasakawa Certificate of Distinction was also awarded to ActionAid International, a South African based International Non-Governmental organization, for its pioneering role in incorporating disaster risk reduction and the Hyogo Framework into its activities for achieving sustainable development in the near future.

The recipients of the three Sasakawa Certificates of Merit were: the Social Action Centre in the Philippines, “La Red Habitat en Riesgo” in Argentina, and the Disaster Mitigation for Sustainable Livelihoods Programme in South Africa. These organizations are being recognized for their dedicated work that has led to the increased resilience of their respective communities. Although working in different contexts – charitable works and from the field of science – they have moved beyond the mindset of emergency relief and reaction, and have ensured that formal and informal learning from disasters is enhanced and institutionalized.

Together with the WHO Sasakawa Health Prize and the UNEP Sasakawa Environment Prize, the UN Sasakawa Award for Disaster Reduction is one of three prestigious prizes established in 1986 by the Nippon Foundation in Japan. The UN Sasakawa Jury which chooses the Laureates is composed of representatives from the five continents.

More information about the Laureates’ achievements and transcripts of interviews with Mr Gibbs and Professor Kawata are also available on our website : <http://www.unisdr.org/eng/sasakawa/2007/sk-2007-description-eng.htm>