



United Nations  
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## PRESS RELEASE

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We need to do better to protect vulnerable people against “predictable” disasters

After the devastation caused by the tropical storm Noel in the Caribbean states and the current floods in Tabasco, Mexico, the UN secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction is urging governments and the international community to better protect people against “predictable” disasters, and do more to reduce risk and vulnerability to hazards.

The recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report predicts more frequent and intense tropical cyclones (typhoons and hurricanes) and floods as a result of climate change; we are already seeing that intensification.

Flooding is one of the most easily predicted, expected, and announced natural hazards, but not enough is done to prepare and protect the poor, the people most affected by flooding. Poor people have the less means to adapt their living conditions before or after flooding, and are often constrained by circumstance to live in high-risk areas such as slopes, flood plains and ravines, which are prone to landslides and floods.

“There are many inexpensive measures that can be systematically adopted in disaster-prone countries to reduce the impact of hazards. Risk assessments, early warning systems, evacuation plans, education and land use planning are a few of the many cost effective and reliable non-structural ways to avoid floods becoming disasters,” recommends Salvano Briceño, Director of the UN secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. “Many non-structural measures are within the financial means of most communities to implement.”

Flooding this year has already caused much more devastation than last year. According to the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) already more than 140 million people have been affected by floods so far this year, mainly due to the extensive floods in China (over 100 million). This is about 4 times the number for the same period last year. There were over 34 million persons affected by floods between 1 January and the end of October, 2006. The Tropical storm Noel has already killed 108 people and caused huge damage.

“We need to find better ways to avoid those recurrent disasters – ultimately, all communities, rich and poor, will be affected,” says Salvano Briceño. He noted that the 168 governments which gathered at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in January 2005 clearly recognized that governments have the primary responsibility for disaster risk reduction, and adopted the Hyogo Framework for Action to reduce the impact of disasters by 2015.