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PRESS RELEASE

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Poorly constructed buildings kill people during earthquakes

As seen in Pakistan in October 2005, in Iran in December 2003 and earlier this week in China, collapsed buildings are the main killers when earthquake strikes. Hundreds of thousands of buildings, among them many schools, collapsed after a 7.9 magnitude earthquake struck China last Monday.

“We know how to make buildings more resistant to earthquakes, but this knowledge is still not yet well disseminated among decision-makers who enforce building codes for houses, schools and hospitals” says Salvano Briceño, Director of the UN secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, who is in Pakistan for the International Conference on School Safety (14-16 May 2008, Islamabad). “Schools, hospitals and other critical infrastructure need to be systematically upgraded and retrofitted in earthquake prone areas if we want to save lives. Vulnerability to earthquakes is still a main cause of death during disasters” says Salvano Briceño.

The UN/ISDR secretariat, UNESCO and UNICEF jointly launched a global campaign from 2006-2007 called ‘Disaster risk reduction begins at school’ to promote school safety and disaster risk reduction. This has been followed by the 2008-2009 world campaign with WHO and the World Bank to promote safe hospitals and health facilities. Both schools and hospitals play important roles in saving the lives of society’s most vulnerable people during disasters, if they are properly designed and built.

”There are still too many poorly designed and constructed buildings in earthquake-prone areas, and too many people dying because of it” says Salvano Briceño

The Islamabad Conference, organized by the Aga Khan Planning and Building Service (AKPBS) and Focus Humanitarian Assistance, Pakistan which is ending today, aims to define a plan of action to promote school safety in the region. The three day event included a visit to Balakot, North West Frontier Province, which was severely affected by the 2005 earthquake, and two days of discussions aiming to improve policies and institutional mechanisms for reducing risk and vulnerability of communities to disasters.

For more information about the Conference please go to: www.schoolsafetyconference.org