

**UNISDR 2012/31**  
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## **UNISDR CHIEF HONOURS CROATIAN CHAMPION OF CHANGE**

**Dubrovnik, 1 October** – The UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, Margareta Wahlström, today urged other countries to follow the example of Croatia in recognising individual efforts to raise awareness of disaster risk in their own communities.

Ms. Wahlström, the head of the UN's Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) and the Croatian Minister of Interior, Ranko Ostojić, today presented Croatian educator, Sunčana Jokić, with the country's first "Champion of Change" award established by the Croatian National Protection and Rescue Directorate (NPRD).

During a four-year period working with special needs children attending a small elementary school, Ms. Jokić observed one day how frightened they became when a storm knocked slates off the roof.

"I had to do something. We should not be over-protective of these children. We need to explain to them about disasters because they are more vulnerable than most. If you teach the child, you teach the family," she said.

She made contact with the NPRD which now includes children with special needs in their outreach activities at community level. Ms. Jokić was particularly pleased when one of her pupils took a prize in a national art competition on the theme of disasters.

Ms. Jokić was Director of the Lièe Faraguna Center in Labin, Croatia, specializing in elementary education and pupils with mild, moderate and severe learning disabilities. In her new post in Lobarika, she has continued to push for more inclusion of disaster risk reduction in the school curriculum, especially in lessons for vulnerable groups.

The Croatian National Protection and Rescue Directorate says that "without Ms. Jokić the inclusion or adaptation of protection and rescue activities in the community of children and young people, who belong to vulnerable groups, would be virtually impossible."

The award was inspired by the United States' "Champion of Change" programme (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/champions>) and is meant for either an individual or groups of individuals that are recognized for the work they are doing to improve their communities in terms of building disaster resilience.

**About UNISDR:** UNISDR is the UN office dedicated to disaster risk reduction. It is led by the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Disaster Risk Reduction and supports implementation of the *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters* which seeks "the substantial reduction of disaster losses, in lives and in the social, economic and environmental assets of communities and countries."

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