

## Press release

13 October 2014 - UNISDR 2014/25

# UN AND HELPAGE CALL TO REDUCE DEATH TOLL AMONG OVER-60S IN DISASTERS

**13 October 2014, GENEVA** – The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) and HelpAge International today issued a joint call for greater involvement of older persons in disaster management efforts worldwide in order to bring down death tolls among those over 60.

There is strong evidence that older persons suffer disproportionately from disasters even in developed countries. In 2005, 75% of those killed by Hurricane Katrina were over 60 but made up just 15% of the population in New Orleans. In 2011, 56% of those who died in the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami were 65 and over, despite comprising just 23% of the population.

A survey conducted for today's International Day for Disaster Reduction demonstrates that older persons are often excluded or marginalised when disaster management plans are being drawn up at community level. 58% of respondents said they did not know who was responsible for disaster preparedness in their communities and 68% do not participate at all in such activity.

Asked how they would like to be better included in decision-making on disaster planning, 70% of respondents noted their wish to explain the special needs and vulnerabilities of older persons while 43% said they wish to be given training so that they can help the community in disaster preparedness and response. And 32% said they wished to share their experiences on how to cope with disaster situations.

UNISDR and HelpAge International are calling on governments to sign up to Charter 14 for Older People in Disaster Risk Reduction and commit to specific inclusion of older persons in all facets of disaster management planning with a strong emphasis on early warnings and evacuation procedures (<http://www.unisdr.org/2014/iddr/documents/Charter14.pdf>).

UNISDR Head, Margareta Wahlström, said: "The older person is often invisible in our communities until they show up in the mortality figures after a disaster event. Demographic change means we are living in an ageing world. It is important to include older persons in disaster management for both their improved protection and to make full use of their experience, skills and knowledge in support of that.

"The world needs to become more acutely aware of how to protect older persons as the climate changes and the ageing population is exposed to more extreme events. For instance, thousands of people die every year in heat waves and older persons living in poverty are among the most vulnerable. Inclusion of their needs and social protection measures are vital to the success of disaster management in the years ahead."

There are 868 million people aged over 60 – that's 12% of the global population. By 2050, it is predicted that there will be nearly as many people aged 60 or over as children under 15: 2.02 billion compared with 2.03 billion.

“Older people bear the initial brunt of disasters often because they cannot flee,” said HelpAge International’s Chief Executive, Toby Porter, at the launch of a joint event with UNISDR in Rustenburg, South Africa. “This is compounded by the lack of essential medications for older people, such as to treat diabetes, being available after disasters. The mental fall-out from disasters is huge. Older women and men are ready to help others but are often too proud to help themselves.”

“To turn this around, governments and disaster management agencies need to address older people’s vulnerabilities and tap into the years of experience, knowledge and skills that they bring to help reduce the effects of disasters,” said Porter.

#### **Guidelines:**

HelpAge International have found effective ways of including older people in disaster preparedness and response, as well as mitigation, protection and planning activities and has just published “**Disaster Resilience in an Ageing World. How to make policies and programmes inclusive of older people**” outlining how disaster management practitioners can include older people and meet their requirements in:

- Risk assessment
- Early warning systems
- Stockpiling
- Evacuation planning
- Training of responders
- Protection and psychosocial response
- Health and nutrition planning

The guideline publication also recommends ways to work with older people to address the underlying economic, social, environmental, and/or physical causes of vulnerability to disaster risks through:

- Livelihoods
- Climate-smart agriculture
- Micro- credit and insurance
- Social protection

To download copies of the report click here: [www.helpage.org](http://www.helpage.org)

#### **HelpAge International Media Contacts:**

**Beth Howgate**, Media Relations officer  
Email: [beth.howgate@helpage.org](mailto:beth.howgate@helpage.org)  
Phone: +44 20 7148 7606. Mobile: + 44 7713 567 624  
Skype: [beth.howgate.hai](https://www.skype.com/people/beth.howgate.hai)

**Sarah Gillam**, Media Relations Manager  
Email: [sarah.gillam@helpage.org](mailto:sarah.gillam@helpage.org)  
Phone: +44 207 148 7623 Mobile: +44 07713 567624

**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.”

<http://www.unisdr.org>

<http://www.twitter.com/unisdr>

<http://www.facebook.com/disaster.reduction>