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### **Disaster risk reduction is essential for sustainable development**

Ministers of Environment from Asia and the Pacific will meet from 24 to 29 March 2005 in Seoul, Republic of Korea, at the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development in Asia and the Pacific convened by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific of the United Nations (ESCAP). The Conference, which is held every five years, will explore ways and means by which environmental considerations could become an opportunity for economic growth and industrial competitiveness rather than a constraint and additional cost.

"Achieving Environmentally Sustainable Economic Growth" or "Green Growth" will be the main theme of the Conference and one of the main challenges for the future. Among the major events in the margins of the Ministerial Conference, an Eminent Scientists Symposium 24-25 March 2005, will discuss on issues relating to "Global Change, Environment and Development".

"This symposium will be an opportunity to recall that disaster risk reduction should be integrated into policies, plans and programmes of sustainable development and poverty reduction", says Salvano Briceno, Director of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, who will be one of the 80 environmental experts participating at the discussions. "Environmental degradation has been the main cause of the devastating floods, which occurred last year in Haiti and the Philippines. The entire United Nations system, together with member states, national and regional organizations, have to commit themselves fully to disaster risk reduction policies if we want to avoid a re-emergence of such events there or anywhere else in regions often prone to natural disasters."

Following the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Kobe, Japan, in January 2005, the ISDR is building on the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) 2005-2015 to strengthen the resilience of nations and communities to disasters. The ISDR will support countries to identify, establish and reinforce national mechanisms for implementing disaster reduction policies.

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“The ISDR secretariat is developing a matrix of roles and initiatives to identify existing institutional responsibilities and indicators to help countries and international and regional actors assess their progress in the implementation of disaster reduction policies. Those guidelines will be essential in reducing poverty ” says Salvano Briceño.

The Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment will also give a briefing on the follow-up to the tsunami relief operations. “The two main priorities at present are to maintain the momentum of the process led by UNESCO/IOC to establish a tsunami early warning system in the Indian Ocean region and to achieve the more complex tasks of building awareness, and preparedness mechanisms within a multi-hazard and global framework”, says Salvano Briceño.

“ We still have lot to do but are making progress. The Second International Coordination Meeting for the Development of an Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System, taking place in Mauritius on 14-16 April, will be another step forward.”

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