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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **55 MILLION PEOPLE AFFECTED BY EXTREME WEATHER DISASTERS IN 2009**

*Copenhagen* – Over three quarters of the people killed - and 95 % of the total affected by natural hazards - since the beginning of the year were due to extreme weather events said Ms. Margareta Wahlström, the United Nations Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, based on the preliminary 2009 disaster figures.

The 2009 figures released by the Belgian WHO collaborating Centre for Research on Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), cover the period from 1 January to November 2009.

Out of the 245 disasters in 2009, 224 were weather related, accounting for 55 million people out of the 58 million people affected, 7000 out of 8900 of those killed, and US\$15 billion out of the US\$19 billion in economic damages.

In 2009, 11 million people were affected by floods, compared to 178 million people in 2007 and 45 million in 2008.

“Statistics this year show lower figures compared to previous years, which is good news for people and countries, however extreme weather disasters remain top of the list and will continue to affect more people in the future as more than half of the world's population highly exposed is living in coastal regions” said Margareta Wahlström.

“The extreme weather event figures are probably underestimated as drought impacts are not easily detected in disaster statistics” said Professor Debarati Guha Sapid, Director of CRED in a joint UNISDR, UNDP and WMO press conference today in Copenhagen.

Drought is a major hazard and a slow onset disaster in many part of the world with long term consequences on people and their assets. It undermines livelihoods and kills slowly through malnutrition and disease. In Africa alone, drought accounted for less than 20% of disaster occurrences but affected 80% of all people in the continent between 1970 and 2008 (CRED).

In Kenya this year, 3.8 million people needed food and assistance. Other regions such as Central America, Colombia and Western Sahel were also affected by serious droughts.

“A lack of access to clean water, in fact a lack of access to water at all, is already a major threat to human security. Disasters can be caused by too little water as well as too much water. In cities around the world, even simple measures such as drainage systems can save lives and prevent losses” said Margareta Wahlström.

Asia is especially vulnerable to storms and floods. Between January and November 2009, 48 million people were affected by weather-related events, which remain the highest risk with the largest numbers of affected people.

Michel Jarraud, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization who announced that the year 2009 is among the top 10 warmest years on record since the beginning of instrumental climate records in 1850, also underlined the importance of early warning systems, and seasonal climate forecasts to manage risks and to better prepare vulnerable populations to cope with more extreme events.

“Progress in monitoring, forecasting and warnings of climate-related hazards, linked to effective emergency preparedness and response on the ground, saves lives. In the last five decades, globally, while the numbers of disasters and related economic losses have increased between 10 and 50 times, the reported loss of life has dramatically been reduced by a factor of 10. Climate forecasting and information allows us to plan our communities better so as to reduce the risk of disaster when extreme weather strikes. This can help save livelihoods through better planning in health, agriculture, insurance and water resource management” said Michel Jarraud.

Benefits of investments in tropical cyclone early warning systems were demonstrated in Cuba in 2008, when the country was hit by five successive hurricanes, but only seven people were reported dead. In Bangladesh, nearly 3500 lives were lost during super cyclone Sidr in November 2007, compared to two other events in 1970 and 1991 which respectively claimed over 300,000 and 191,000 lives.

These examples however, are still rare. A survey conducted by WMO in 2006 revealed that over 60% of the WMO's 189 Members are not adequately equipped with the technical capacities to warn populations against hazards, particularly in the most vulnerable countries. These capacities need to be developed. In addition, climate information, forecasts and projection combined with operational and strategic sectoral planning provide unprecedented opportunities for saving livelihoods and reduce economic risks associated with hazards in many sectors such as agriculture, water resource management, health and insurance.

“There are proven measures for reducing the tragic and devastating losses from climate disasters” said Olav Kjørven, Policy Director at the United Nations Development Programme. “They include early warning systems, adjusted building codes, resilient infrastructure and government crisis response plans. Successful preparation and planning can prevent death and minimize the level of damage to homes, schools, hospitals, roads and harvests.”

Trends in extreme events and capacities to manage disaster risks are currently being assessed as part of the new WMO/UNEP Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report entitled “Managing the Risk of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation” to be released in 2011.

**Statistics: Natural Disasters\* in 2009 (January - November)**

- Occurrence of natural disasters:  
245
- Total deaths: 8919
- Total affected: 58 million
- Estimated damage: 19 billion US\$

\* Biological disasters excluded

Disaster figures for 2000 - 2009 (% contribution of climate related to natural disasters)

| Year         | Occurrence  |  | N° Killed     |  | N° Affected (Million) |  | Economic Losses (Billion) |  |
|--------------|-------------|--|---------------|--|-----------------------|--|---------------------------|--|
|              |             | % contribution climate related to natural disasters* |               | % contribution climate related to natural disasters* |                       | % contribution climate related to natural disasters* |                           | % contribution climate related to natural disasters* |
| 2000         | 413         | 91.0%  | 9686          | 97.7%  | 173                   | 98.5%  | 46                        | 99.1%  |
| 2001         | 379         | 91.8%  | 30981         | 31.1%  | 109                   | 91.0%  | 27                        | 72.7%  |
| 2002         | 422         | 89.3%  | 12657         | 85.0%  | 660                   | 99.8%  | 52                        | 96.0%  |
| 2003         | 360         | 88.3%  | 109991        | 73.1%  | 255                   | 98.3%  | 70                        | 88.2%  |
| 2004         | 354         | 86.4%  | 241635        | 5.9%   | 162                   | 98.0%  | 136                       | 71.7%  |
| 2005         | 434         | 92.4%  | 89210         | 14.5%  | 160                   | 95.9%  | 214                       | 96.9%  |
| 2006         | 401         | 90.8%  | 23502         | 71.5%  | 122                   | 96.5%  | 34                        | 89.5%  |
| 2007         | 413         | 93.7%  | 16857         | 95.8%  | 211                   | 99.4%  | 75                        | 78.4%  |
| 2008         | 349         | 90.5%  | 235298        | 62.6%  | 216                   | 77.9%  | 190                       | 54.9%  |
| 2009         | 245         | 91.4%  | 8919          | 79.4%  | 58                    | 94.3%  | 19                        | 84.1%  |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>3770</b> |  | <b>778736</b> |  | <b>2126</b>           |  | <b>863</b>                |  |

Source: EM-DAT: The OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database – www.emdat.be – Université Catholique de Louvain – Brussels – Belgium.

\* Biological disasters excluded

CRED is a World Health Organization collaborating centre based in Brussels. Since 1988, CRED has been maintaining an Emergency Events Database known as EM-DAT. EM-DAT includes all disasters from 1900 until present, which fit at least one of the following criteria:

- 10 or more people killed.
- 100 or more people affected.
- Declaration of a state of emergency.
- Call for international assistance.

To access the EM-DAT database, visit <http://www.emdat.be/Database/terms.html>.

**For further information and media assistance, please contact:**

UNISDR: Brigitte Leoni. Tel: +41229178897/ +41794445262. E-mail: [leonib@un.org](mailto:leonib@un.org)

World Meteorological Organization (WMO). Carine Richard-Van Maele, Chief, Communications and Public Affairs, Mobile: 0041 79 406 47 30; E-mail: [cpa@wmo.int](mailto:cpa@wmo.int) Marie Heuzé, Senior Information Advisor, Mobile: +0045 53 99 6061; E-mail: [mheuze@wmo.int](mailto:mheuze@wmo.int). Gaëlle Sévenier, Press Officer. Tel. +41 (0) 22 730 8417, E-mail: [gsevenier@wmo.int](mailto:gsevenier@wmo.int)

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) .Stanislav Saling: Tel: +1 212 906 5296 / 917 213 0671. E-mail: [Stanislav.saling@undp.org](mailto:Stanislav.saling@undp.org)

For further information and media assistance, please contact:

Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED). Régina Below. Tel.  
+32-2-764-3326 - fax: +32-2-764-3441. E-mail: [regina.below@uclouvain.be](mailto:regina.below@uclouvain.be)