

Message for The International Day For Disaster Reduction 14 October 2009

The 2009 International Day for Disaster Reduction focuses on the safety and function of hospital and health facilities in disasters. In 2009, the force of natural calamities has been revealed once again. Recent typhoons in the Philippines, Vietnam and China, the tsunami in Samoa and the earthquakes in Indonesia, the West African floods and Kenya's chronic drought conditions are reminders of how vulnerable we are to natural hazards and extreme weather events.

Disaster risk reduction is an indispensable tool to protect the health, welfare and assets of people and countries. Protecting hospitals and health facilities is a priority action to reduce disaster impacts worldwide and a common challenge that faces the international community and individual countries together.

In 2008, with the support of the World Bank, the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) and the World Health Organization (WHO) launched a biennial World Disaster Reduction Campaign: Hospitals Safe from Disasters and worked closely with governments and international and regional organizations to better protect health facilities and hospitals and ensure they can function both during and in the aftermath of disasters.

Two years later, a lot has been done to raise awareness about hospital safety. Health task forces that bring together all stakeholders have been established, workshops held and projects to implement building codes and train staff carried out. Despite the end of the two-year campaign, the work towards safer hospitals continues, with more initiatives about to be launched: a WHO Global Programme on Safe Hospitals; a pledging campaign on safer hospitals and schools in the Asia Pacific region; and the creation of a Thematic Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction for Health.

The International Day for Disaster Reduction marks the culmination of the 2008-2009 World Disaster Reduction Campaign and highlights the efforts taking place worldwide to reduce risk, protect health facilities and save lives. Yet much remains to be done and further investments are needed. According to a recent WHO survey, only 50% of all countries' health sectors have allocated a budget for risk reduction and emergency preparedness.

In this context, we urge nations to take the necessary steps to make hospitals safe from disaster. We call upon the global community to build new hospitals that will withstand the impacts of natural hazards; assess and make existing facilities safer; and ensure the staff of health facilities are trained and prepared to respond to emergencies and disasters.

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