

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR DISASTER REDUCTION
13 October 2010

Biggest, deadliest, worst ever. We have seen those words in the headlines too often this year. We have used them about earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and forest fires, about loss of life and income. Those words are likely to be heard for years to come, as the climate changes and hazards multiply. To complicate the picture, just as weather patterns have altered, so has human society. We are more urban. If earthquakes, floods or storm surges were deadly in the past, they are deadlier still in an increasingly urbanized world.

Many cities are on the coasts, vulnerable to storms, inundation and sea level rise. More than a billion people in Asia live within 100 kilometres of the sea, and two-thirds of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean live within 200 kilometres. Too many people live on flood plains, others above earthquake fault lines. Some settle downstream from treeless areas, with little buffer against the elements. The risk of disaster quietly accumulates. And, while natural hazards menace everyone, the poor are by far the most vulnerable.

On the positive side, we are learning to cope. Today, on the International Day for Disaster Reduction, we recognize what local governments and communities are doing to protect themselves while building more sustainable towns and cities. Last May, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction launched a global campaign called “Making Cities Resilient”. More than 100 cities, with nearly 110 million residents, have signed up to the “Ten Essentials” – actions that will make communities safer from disasters. The role models with good practices include Albay Province in the Philippines, Hyogo Prefecture in Japan, Bangkok, Bonn, Mexico City and Mumbai.

The Ten Essentials translate broad ideas about sustainable cities into workable solutions. They recommend that governments assign a budget to serve everyone – rich and poor alike – and that they invest in risk assessment, training on disaster risk reduction, ecosystem protection, and early warning systems. City planners must also tackle the principal sources of risk in urban areas: poor governance, planning and enforcement. Decision-making should be inclusive and participatory and the principles of sustainable urbanization must be embraced and upheld, especially for the benefit of people living in slums and informal settlements.

Reducing disaster risk is everybody's business, and needs everyone's participation and investment – civil society and professional networks as well as municipal and national governments. On this International Day for Disaster Reduction, I commend those cities that are acting to build resilience to climate, environmental and social risks. And to all others I pose this question: Is your city ready?