

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR DISASTER REDUCTION
13 October 2014

As a human family, we are growing older. Globally, approximately 700 million people – 10 per cent of the world’s population – are over the age of 60, and by 2030, there will be more elderly persons than children for the first time in history.

This year’s commemoration of the International Day for Disaster Reduction is an opportunity to recognize the role of older men and women in fostering resilience.

When a natural disaster hits, older persons suffer disproportionately high levels of death and injuries. This tragic trend must be reversed through plans, services and support that ensure we address the vulnerabilities facing older persons while optimizing their contributions to our collective safety and wellbeing.

Disaster planning must take account of the reduced mobility experienced by many older persons. We have to enable them to prepare for a potential disaster, reach safety and protect themselves. The needs of older persons should also be taken into account in early warning systems, social protection mechanisms, evacuation and emergency response plans, and public awareness campaigns.

At the same time, it is important to recognize that older persons have strengths that can serve the community at large. Their years of experience can help in reducing risks posed by disasters. We should involve them in disaster risk management as well as related planning and decision-making processes. Older persons can also meaningfully enrich our critical global discussions on addressing climate change and achieving sustainable development.

On this International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction, let us remind ourselves that building resilience to disasters has no time limit in one’s life; it starts in youth and grows more important as we age.