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PRESS RELEASE

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High-level political support for “policy of prevention” to be discussed at Third Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, as delegates consider global framework for managing risk from natural hazards

Geneva – The international community must “risk proof” development because disasters are taking a heavy toll on rich and poor countries as well as outpacing their ability to respond, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon told delegates today, at the foremost gathering of stakeholders on reducing disaster risk which opened this afternoon in Geneva and will run until Friday, 13 May.

Drawing from the Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction 2011, *Revealing Risk, Redefining Development* which was launched at the Global Platform today, the Secretary-General said: “It shows that as countries invest more in early warning and preparedness, mortality risk from floods and cyclones is trending down. At the same time, economic loss and damage to homes, schools, health facilities and livelihoods are on the rise.”

Delegates from 175 Governments and over 176 regional and national organizations -- making up an estimated 2,300 participants -- are participating in the week-long Third Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, managed by the United Nations secretariat for the International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR). UNISDR was established in 2000 by the General Assembly.

The Global Platform is the main forum on disaster risk reduction bringing together a wide cross-section of the worldwide disaster risk reduction community every two years, including senior ministers, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations, scientific and technical experts, and others. Under the slogan “Invest Today for a Safer Tomorrow - Increase investments in Local Action,” the event will focus on the links between the rising cost of disasters, how local communities adapt to climate change and the status of poverty eradication efforts before the 2015 deadline for both Millennium Development Goals as well as the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA).

In 10 years UNISDR has built support for disaster risk reduction in major international agreements, including the Cancun climate change agreement in December 2010. The secretariat is headed by the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction, Margareta Wahlström, whose focus is on solidifying political support for risk reduction from the highest levels of government.

“Governments are already involved in their own risk management efforts, as shown in our mid-term review of the HFA published in March,” explained Ms. Wahlström. “What is needed now is a big push for countries to act together, because one country’s policies can affect other nations in ways that we cannot predict perfectly. A disaster in one part of the world can have great effects across the globe, whether it is a

tsunami in Asia that damages important infrastructure, or a bad flood in Australia that halts economic production that is vital to other countries.”

At the end of the four-day conference, the Platform will issue an agreed Chair’s Summary which will include a communiqué and a plan of action. What is expected is strong call for mobilization around a new international blueprint for disaster risk reduction, after HFA – expires in 2015 as well as political support to propel risk reduction into the sustainable development framework. A notable difference from previous Global Platforms is the chair of the 2011 Platform, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migirom, signalling the rising stature of disaster risk reduction within the Organization and its now obvious link to development.

Ms. Migirom will preside over three key plenary sessions: “Invest today for a safe tomorrow – increase investment in local action”; “The economics of disaster – effective financial instruments to reduce risk”; and “Climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction.”

The question of nuclear energy safety, on most people’s minds after a powerful earthquake rocked a Japanese nuclear power plant on 11 March, was the subject of discussion among high-level United Nations officials at a pre-opening session at noon on the first day, attended by the Secretary-General. The conference was then officially opened by the United Nations Secretary-General and World Bank Managing Director Sri Mulyani Indrawati, in recognition of the major role played by the Bank at the Global Platform this year, which has organized a unique event within the Platform -- the World Reconstruction Conference.

Other events slated for the four-and-half-day conference include:

- Ten Roundtables. The topics are: Preparedness; Ensuring a Return on Investment in Local Action; Addressing Wildland Fire Risk; Public Investment – Where Disaster Risk Reduction Really Makes a Difference; Engaging the Private Sector; Managing Watersheds for Urban Resilience; Children for Resilience; Making Disaster Risk Reduction Gender Sensitive; Safety Nets for Disaster Risk Reduction; and Mountains of Risk.
- Six Featured Events. The topics are: Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction; Dialogue with Parliamentarians and Mayors on Disaster Risk Reduction: From Policy to Local Action; Education and Safe Schools; Natural Hazards, UnNatural Disasters – Economics of Effective Prevention; Protecting Public Health from Disaster Risks; Operational Climate Services for Managing Socio-Economic Risks linked to the Changing Climate.
- Sasakawa Award for Disaster Risk Reduction, prize-giving ceremony. Announcement of winners for the UN-Sasakawa Award for Disaster Risk Reduction, an award for innovative DRR programmes.
- 24 Side Events, which topics ranging from “Integrated Drought Risk Management” to “Risk Identification and National Capacity to Manage Risk”
- A market-place featuring more than 30 booths/exhibits from ISDR partners.
- The Ignite Stage – day-long presentations of projects and new initiatives in disaster risk reduction: “15 minutes to spark a lasting conversation.”
- Chair’s Summary session followed by the Closing Ceremony

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The complete programme is available on the Global Platform website at <http://www.preventionweb.net/globalplatform/2011/programme/>.

Participating United Nations funds, programmes and agencies include: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); International Labour Organization (ILO); International Organization for Migration (IOM); United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF); United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification; United Nations Development Group (UNDG); United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP); United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA); United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP); United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC); United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR); United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT); United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR); United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA); United Nations Platform for Space-based Information for Disaster Management and Emergency Response (UN-SPIDER); United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA); United Nations University; World Food Programme (WFP); World Health Organization (WHO); World Meteorological Organization (WMO).