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## UNISDR ISSUES FLOOD WARNING AS THAW SETS IN ACROSS EASTERN AND CENTRAL EUROPE

**GENEVA, 21 February 2012** – The UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, UNISDR, today said the European Flood Alert System could soon be put to its greatest test since widespread flooding ten years ago led to its creation by the European Commission.

The UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction, Margareta Wahlström, said she was particularly concerned about the consequences for those countries bordering the Danube where the ice is now starting to break up in the first signs of a spring thaw.

“This severe winter in which hundreds of people have died has highlighted several weaknesses in our built environment and our ability to prepare for worst-case scenarios. Vulnerable communities across Europe have been cut off from transport, schools, health facilities and electricity in many cases.

“The thaw is now setting in along the Danube. While thousands of people remain snowbound from Serbia to Bulgaria, there are warning signs that destructive floods will add to the loss of life and economic assets particularly in places where there is an absence of flood management infrastructure such as dams and dikes.

“We do need to plan better. The unpredictability of severe weather events leads to high human and financial costs. More focus on winterisation planning will be a wise investment in the coming years.”

She praised the decision of Bulgaria to inspect over 500 dams throughout the country and to release the water from some dams and reservoirs as a measure designed to contain the floodwaters when they come.

The European Flood Alert System (EFAS) was launched by the European Commission following the devastating Elbe and Danube floods in 2002, a year when 20 European countries experienced severe flooding. Worldwide, on average 106 million people were affected annually by floods over the last ten years.

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### **About UNISDR**

UNISDR is the UN office dedicated to disaster risk reduction. It is led by the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Disaster Risk Reduction and supports implementation of the *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters* which has been adopted by 168 countries and seeks “the substantial reduction of disaster losses, in lives and in the social, economic and environmental assets of communities and countries.” Over 130 countries now report on their disaster risk reduction efforts. The biennial Third Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction took place in May 2011

and was opened by the UN Secretary General. It attracted several Heads of State and over 2,600 delegates representing 168 governments, 25 inter-governmental organizations, 65 NGOs and other ISDR partners. UNISDR has facilitated the creation of 38 National Disaster Data Bases around the world as part of its on-going global effort to lead and convince governments and the private sector to invest in risk reduction and avoid recurrent disaster losses which waste development resources. It has also mobilised over 1,000 cities and local governments to take part in the World Disaster Risk Reduction Campaign, *Making Cities Resilient: My City is Getting Ready!* In early 2011, UNISDR supported the initiative by the President of the UN General Assembly to organize the first thematic debate on disaster risk reduction ever held in the UN General Assembly.

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