

Regional United Nations Joint Statement on Disability in Disasters

22 October, Cairo – The theme of the 2013 International Day for Disaster Reduction is ‘Living with Disability and Disasters’. On this important occasion, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) declare their full commitment to scale up efforts for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all policies and programmes aimed at addressing disaster risk reduction and humanitarian situations, regardless of the nature of hazards.

Persons living with disabilities face widespread barriers to accessing services such as health, education, employment and transport, and often face higher risks when a disaster occurs. The basic and specific needs of people with disability are frequently ignored before, during and after disasters, so they are less likely to receive the aid they need. Emergencies can also create a new generation of people with disabilities. This is due to injuries, poor basic health care and mental health and psychological programmes, lack of access to basic and life-saving reproductive health care and a breakdown in support structures.

According to WHO, almost one billion people or 15% of the world’s population live with disability. However, this population group remains insufficiently involved in the risk assessment, planning, and coordination processes designed to manage disaster risks and build resilient communities. Their lack of representation increases their vulnerability and that of their families, which consequently affects the resilience of communities as a whole.

Persons with disabilities can effectively contribute to disaster risk reduction initiatives by identifying possible solutions based on their own needs and experiences. Staff and volunteers should also develop their knowledge of the specific needs and capacities of people with disabilities, and apply humanitarian and other core principles, such as equality and non-discrimination, to guide disability inclusive risk management measures.

On the occasion of the 2013 International Day for Disaster Reduction, WHO, UNISDR, UNDP, UNOCHA and UNFPA call on all governments, civil society, disabled people’s organizations and humanitarian and development partners to work together to ensure the inclusion of the concerns of persons with disabilities within all policies and practices that address all aspects of disaster risk management.

Together, we can ensure the full and effective participation of persons living with disabilities and their representatives in building resilient communities and reducing the risk and consequences of disasters, with the goal of accelerating sustainable development.

