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PRESS RELEASE

UNISDR 2010/24
13 October 2010

International day for disaster reduction

UNISDR urges mayors and citizens to decrease disaster losses

Since the beginning of the year, more than 236,000 people have been killed by disasters and nearly 256 million have been affected by earthquakes, floods, tropical storms and landslides according to the latest figures released by the Centre for Research in the Epidemiology of Disasters.¹

Most of them lived in cities.

“Today’s urban planning demands foresight and much more attention to disaster risk. Poorly built houses, schools and hospitals on floodplains, above seismic fault lines and along fragile slopes expose millions of people to disasters that can be avoided” said Margareta Wahlstrom, Special Representative of the Secretary General for Disaster Risk Reduction. “This also destroys billions of dollars in properties and assets of which only a very small proportion is covered by insurance.”

CRED estimates that disasters have cost countries US\$81 billion in losses from the beginning of the year to 1 September 2010. Munich Re reported that until June 2010 disasters cost US\$70 billion in losses, of which only US\$22 billion were insured losses.

To mark the International Day for Disaster Reduction, the UNISDR calls on all world leaders, policy makers, CEOs, civil society, international financial institutions and donors to join mayors and citizens to make their cities safer against disasters.

According to UN-HABITAT, more than one billion people are currently living in slums and are particularly at risk of landslides, storms and floods and up to 3,351 cities around the world are located in low-lying coastal zones which may be affected by rising sea levels. Six out of the ten largest cities are also located along seismic fault lines.

¹ According to CRED, from 1 January to 1 September 2010, 235 disasters cost US\$81 billion, killed 236,224 people, and affected 255,800,000 others.

“In 2030, two billion people will live in slums and 60% of the world population will live in urban areas. Cities will continue to grow as they represent economic growth, job opportunities, education, culture and modern life but risks will continue to accumulate as well. This is why we call mayors and citizens to act now,” said Ms. Walhstrom.

Last May, UNISDR launched a worldwide campaign called “Making Cities Resilient” and invited mayors and citizens to sign-up to the Ten Essential actions that are workable solutions to reduce disaster risks.

More than 120 cities have already joined the UNISDR World Disaster Reduction Campaign and are committed to complying with one or more of the Ten Essentials. Among them are Mexico City (Mexico), Durban (South Africa), Bogota (Colombia), Port-au-Prince (Haiti), Amman, (Jordan), Albay (the Philippines), Cairns (Australia), Chennai City (India), Kathmandu (Nepal), Saint Louis (Senegal), Bonn (Germany), Karlstad (Sweden) and Nis (Serbia).

Cities that have already joined the campaign agreed to take measures that will comply with one or more of the ten essentials proposed in the campaign. Mexico City has started training about 10,000 civil servants to better protect the city from earthquakes. Amman is implementing a Disaster Risk Management Master Plan. Colombo is expanding a storm drainage system and a tree maintenance unit to reduce storm damage. Saint Louis will take new measures to prepare its city to cope with coastal erosion. In El Salvador a national conference will take place in November on urban resilience.

“The Ten Essentials are a step in the right direction. We cannot stop cities growing but we can start planning them in a more sustainable way. It does not require huge amounts of new resources, but different ways of using existing resources. It requires better coordination between all actors and use of good practices that have been already tested,” said Ms. Walhstrom.

Cities in Haiti, Chile and New Zealand experienced severe earthquakes in 2010. Chile’s magnitude 8.8 earthquake killed one person out of every 595 affected. Haiti’s earthquake was 500 times *less* powerful, yet killed one in every 15 affected. The 7.2 magnitude earthquake in Christchurch in New Zealand killed nobody. Shanty towns with poor regulation compounded the disaster in Haiti.

In 2005, 168 UN Member States adopted the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), a 10-year action plan that focuses on strategic goals to reduce the impact of disasters and better protect populations against disasters. The Making City Resilient campaign is part of the worldwide efforts to make nations and communities safer.

The 2011 Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction that will take place in Geneva in May will be another milestone to engage more mayors and local authorities in the campaign and to highlight the concrete actions that have been taken since the launch of the “Making Cities Resilient” campaign last May in Bonn, Germany.

“This year, we mark a turning point. We still have five years to go to implement the HFA and we encourage everybody today to mark the day, by asking: Is my city ready? How can I make it safer? What can I do as a citizen to make my city more resilient against floods, earthquakes and hurricanes? ”

Notes

To know more about the cities that have already joined please see:

<http://www.unisdr.org/english/campaigns/campaign2010-2011/cities/>

For more information on the World Disaster Reduction Campaign 2010-2011 - *Making Cities Resilient: My city is getting ready*, visit: <http://www.unisdr.org/campaign>