



Joint Press Release
Disaster Uncovered – Bali Hosts Launch of Major UN Report
Bali, Indonesia: 18 May 2009

A major UN Report is launched today in Bali – The disaster risk reduction forum has been organized jointly by ASEAN, UNISDR and the World Bank at the Hotel Sanur Beach Bali on 18-20 May 2009 with the participation of senior officials from ASEAN Member States, and senior representatives from UN agencies, International Financial Institutions, regional and international organisations, and the civil society. The Bali launch is the first regional launch of the 2009 Global Assessment Report. The global launch by the UN Secretary-General was done earlier in Bahrain on 17 May 2009.

In his Foreword to the 200-page Report which draws together reviews, trend analysis and data from across the disaster risk reduction arena, the UN Secretary-General writes: “While we cannot prevent natural phenomena such as earthquakes and cyclones, we can limit their impacts. The scale of any disaster is linked closely to past decisions taken by citizens and governments – or the absence of such decisions. Pre-emptive risk reduction is the key. Sound response mechanisms after the event, however effective, are never enough.”

The Report identifies three key factors that are greatly exposing more people to rising natural hazard impact:

- Unplanned urban development that forces millions of people to live in unsafe human settlements that lack adequate building standards and drainage systems, thus intensifying water run-off during storms and heavy rains.
- Vulnerable livelihoods with many rural people still depending heavily on agriculture and other natural resources where access to the range of subsistence necessities, including land, labour, fertilizers, irrigation facilities, infrastructure and financial services, is heavily constrained.
- Ecosystem decline at a moment when the flow of most ecosystem services is increasing, but at the same time as the total available stock is falling.

The three risk drivers, says the Report, will be exacerbated by an additional factor: climate change – impelled by greenhouse gas emissions generated by affluent societies and individuals, with the resulting burdens falling on developing countries and their poorest citizens – which will expose new locations and more people in proportions never seen before.

Many countries in Asia and the Pacific have seen their economic and social development drastically hindered or even reversed, by natural disasters. Every year and across the region, people lose their assets, their livelihoods, or their lives in types of disaster that are likely to become more frequent or severe as a result of climate change.

“This is the first global report ever which really provides any specific assessment of the low intensity extensive risks in developing countries,” says Margareta Wahlström, the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction. “It shows we need a radical shift in development practices and planning and, as a priority, merging disaster risk reduction, poverty reduction and climate change adaptation into a single, coherent and innovative approach.”

“Rather than an expense, investing in poverty and disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation should be seen as an investment in building a more secure, stable, sustainable and equitable future.”

Commenting on the Report, Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, Secretary-General of ASEAN, stated that “Asia and the Pacific region has in the past and continues to be affected by disasters. ASEAN countries, such as Indonesia, Myanmar and Philippines, are among the few of quoted examples. The Asia Pacific region cannot afford to account for 37% of disasters of the world’s total, nor account for more than 99 per cent of the world’s reported victims, nor more than 94 per cent of people affected, and nor 87 per cent of overall economic damage. These figures should be drastically reduced. The 2009 Global Assessment Report once again draws our attention to why and what we must do to protect the communities and our development gains. We have to; we must do much more to stop these recurrent losses, because if the vicious cycle continues or worsens, for whatever reason, countries will not be able to achieve their development goals”.

Balancing the risk reduction challenges faced by Governments across the world, the Report provides many solutions to mitigating disaster risk and is replete with examples of good practice where sound disaster risk interventions have changed people’s lives for the better.

“East Asian countries are extremely prone to the impacts of multiple natural hazards, which can eliminate years of development gains within minutes, once a disaster strikes”, said the World Bank Vice President for the East Asia and Pacific Region, James Adams. “The 2009 Global Assessment Report provides governments, development partners, and other stakeholders with valuable insights into patterns of disaster risks and climate variability, including the social impacts and potential economic losses. This will support our client governments to identify priority areas for mainstreaming risk reduction and climate change adaptation into investment programs and relevant sectoral policies.”

The Report also proposes a 20-point action plan to reduce risk, focusing on: stepping up efforts to respond to climate change; strengthening the economic resilience of small and vulnerable economies; supporting community initiatives; enhancing national and local governance; encouraging the adoption of high-level development policy frameworks; and, above all, investing in sustainable disaster risk reduction measures.

“Rather than an expense, investing in poverty and disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation should be seen as an investment in building a more secure, stable, sustainable and equitable future,” adds Wahlström.

“Of course weather-related and other unavoidable natural hazards happen. How much damage to life and assets then transpires is largely in our own hands. We know what to do – invest today for a safer tomorrow.”

Notes for Editors:

1. The full Report and associated documentation can be accessed via: www.preventionweb.net/gar09.
2. The Report, which benefited from a generous financial contribution by the Kingdom of Bahrain Government, is a collective effort of the ISDR partnership, including with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), World Meteorological Organization (WMO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the ProVention Consortium, regional inter-governmental and technical institutions, national governments, civil society networks, academic/scientific institutions and many other specific contributors.

3. The Report will be considered in detail at the forthcoming Second Session of the Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction, to be held in Geneva, 16-19 June 2009.
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