



JOINT PRESS RELEASE

2009 Asia Pacific Joint Regional Celebrations

United Nations International Day for Disaster Reduction
and ASEAN Disaster Management Day

Strengthening Regional Cooperation towards Hospitals Safety

14 October 2009

Hospitals and health facilities are in the frontline when floods, hurricanes, cyclones, and earthquakes strike. It has been estimated that, for not integrating disaster risk reduction and safety measures as part of their design, construction and functionality, more than 90,000 hospitals and other health facilities in the world's 49 least developed countries are vulnerable to disasters.

In the Asia and Pacific region, one of the most disaster-prone continents, 49% of Pakistan's health facilities were completely destroyed in most affected areas during the 2005 earthquake. The 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami also severely affected national and local health systems that were providing health services to millions of people. In particular, Indonesia's northern Aceh province counted up to 61% of health facilities damaged.

The tragedies that struck again the region earlier this month, with the destruction of all community assets, in particular vital infrastructures such as hospitals and community health facilities, underscored the urgent action that must be taken to better protect hospitals from natural disasters. Hospitals, clinics and other health facilities are still perceived as lifelines for survival and backbones of community's support. It is therefore a moral imperative to prevent them from turning into secondary causes of suffering and loss of human lives when weak infrastructures collapse on patients and the medical staff.

"The current disaster situation in the ASEAN region has emphasised even more cogently the critical role of hospitals in saving lives and helping the survivors during times of emergencies. Hence, the importance of integrating disaster risk reduction into hospitals and enhancing the resilience of the healthcare environment" says Dr Surin Pitsuwan, Secretary-General of ASEAN.

The 2008-2009 World Disaster Reduction Campaign for Disaster Risk Reduction coordinated by the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, has been

focusing on the theme of "Hospitals Safe from Disasters. This two-year campaign has been a joint initiative of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), the World Health Organization and the World Bank aimed at ensuring people's access to functioning health facilities during and after natural hazards.

"Since the beginning of the campaign, much has been achieved to make hospitals safer but more investments are still needed to improve the functionality of hospitals when disasters occur," says Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction. According to a recent WHO survey, only 50% of all country's health sectors have a budget allocation for risk reduction and emergency preparedness.

In Asia Pacific, UNISDR, together with the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM), the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia Pacific (UNESCAP), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Ministry of Interior of the Royal Thai Government, have joined hands to make safe hospitals a priority. They will jointly organise the 2009 Regional Celebrations of the International Day for Disaster Reduction and the ASEAN Disaster Management Day on Wednesday 14th October 2009, 9:30-12:00 at the United Nations Conference Centre (UNCC), Bangkok, Thailand.

The ceremony will be featuring the announcement of three winners of a regional children's drawing competition jointly launched by ACDM and UNISDR held in early 2009 on the theme "Safe Hospitals - Hospitals in ASEAN Safe from Disasters," with the participation of children from around the ASEAN region aged 8 to 12, with the support from the Siam Commercial Bank of Thailand (SCB). Children were invited earlier this year to describe, through drawings and paintings, how they see safe hospitals and how they believe the latter could contribute to a safer and disaster resilient community in the ASEAN and broader Asia Pacific region. Selected children will be presenting their drawing at the 14th October Ceremony at UNCC.

The ceremony will also include a panel discussion on "Safer Communities and Disaster Resilient Health Facilities in the Asia Pacific region" that will highlight specific national and local achievements on safer hospitals, building on the experience of the Thai Health Ministry and Hospital from the Hat Yai Province. Specific emphasis will also be placed on the regional achievements and cooperation mechanisms put in place to achieve a coordinated safe hospitals strategy throughout Asia Pacific, in particular through a Regional Task Force on Safe Hospitals established early 2008.

The commitments made at the second session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (June 2009, Geneva) to ensure national assessments of existing health facilities' safety by 2011 will provide the Regional Task Force with a new impetus to consider adapting the Hospital Safety Index that has now been applied to

many health facilities in other regions (Latin America, Arab States) in the Asia Pacific region.

WHO will continue working with governments to achieve the objectives of the campaign and assure that they remain a priority for governments together with financial institutions, private and non-government organisations, professional bodies, health institutions and workforce, and international agencies.

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