

## Press release

16 January 2015 – UNISDR 2015/01

### SEISMIC RISK AND THE 20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE KOBE EARTHQUAKE

**16 JANUARY 2015, KOBE/GENEVA** – The Head of the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), Margareta Wahlström, today congratulated the Japanese people and government for their steadfast remembrance of the 6,434 people who lost their lives on January 17 when the Great Hanshin Awaji Earthquake struck at 5.46 a.m. local time. She will participate in tomorrow's official commemoration.

Ms. Wahlström said: "It is important to remember distant events because a short memory is the enemy of disaster management. Earthquakes kill more people than any other natural hazard. In the 20 years since Kobe, almost half of the two million deaths from major reported disasters have occurred in earthquakes.

"Five of the most deadly earthquakes of the last 100 years have occurred in the last ten years. The 2010 Haiti earthquake destroyed Port-au-Prince; the Indian Ocean tsunami affected 14 countries; the 2008 Szechuan earthquake in China and the 2005 Muzaffarabad earthquake in Pakistan, took over 80,000 lives each. These four earthquakes alone had a combined death toll of some 500,000, injured many more and disrupted the lives of millions.

"In addition, the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and Tsunami in 2011 taught us a lesson about seismic risk in the nuclear age. These five catastrophic events over a short period of time convey a strong message about risk and exposure in the 21<sup>st</sup> century driven by population growth and urbanization. Proper land use and building codes are key to reducing risk."

Ms. Wahlström will also be meeting with Japanese officials to discuss the agenda and the arrangements for the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction which will take place in Sendai, Japan, from 14-18 March [www.wcdrr.org](http://www.wcdrr.org).

Seismic risk will be an important feature of the Conference which will adopt a new framework for disaster risk reduction that will update the world's first comprehensive blueprint to disaster risk reduction, the Hyogo Framework for Action, adopted at the last World Conference, held in Kobe, Hyogo Prefecture, in January 2005.

**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 seeks "the substantial reduction of disaster losses, in lives and in the social, economic and environmental assets of communities and countries."

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