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PRESS RELEASE

UN/ISDR 2007/13
October 10, 2007

International Day for Disaster Reduction TOO MANY CHILDREN STILL THREATENED BY NATURAL HAZARDS

To mark the International Day for Disaster Reduction and the conclusion of its two year campaign on education, the secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction is launching today a new publication showing how children can be better educated to face disasters.

The publication: "Towards a Culture of Prevention: Disaster Risk Reduction Begins at School" gives 35 concrete examples of how to make children safer in their classrooms and educate them about disasters. (The publication is posted on the ISDR website at: www.unisdr.org/iddr-2007)

Bangladesh, Indonesia, Mozambique, Costa Rica, France, Madagascar, the Philippines, Iran, Tanzania and Peru are providing good examples of educational projects that can help children to be more disaster prepared. Meanwhile, India, Japan and Nepal's initiatives to make schools physically safer can be easily replicated worldwide.

The ISDR campaign "Disaster Risk Reduction Begins at School" was launched last year with UNESCO, UNICEF, IFRC, ActionAid International and other partners, and focused on two main objectives: making school buildings safer and integrating disaster risk reduction into school curricula.

Children are one of the groups most vulnerable to disasters. More than 10 000 schools were destroyed in Pakistan during the 2005 earthquake and many others by this year's Hurricane Felix in the Caribbean, and by the recent floods in Uganda. Approximately 34 million children worldwide are attending school in areas threatened by earthquake risk. Millions of other children are threatened by volcanoes, hurricanes, drought, wildfires, storms and floods.

"Too many children are dying because they are not educated to live with disasters or because they are attending classes in unsafe buildings. Making schools safer must be the priority of every government in a disaster prone country. Disaster risk reduction has no cost compared to the loss of a school full of children buried alive in a mudslide or crushed by a falling building," says Salvano Briceño, Director of the ISDR.

To mark the International Day for Disaster reduction today, the ISDR secretariat is also:

Organizing a Roundtable Discussion at the Palais des Nations, Geneva to identify the next steps needed to advance the results of the campaign.

Introducing the Laureates of the 2007 Sasakawa Award for Disaster Reduction

Launching its online videogame “Stop Disasters” in French, Spanish, Chinese and Russian. (This event will take place at Room XXI, Door 40, Palais des Nations, Geneva, from 10 to 12 am.)

“Stop Disasters” was launched in English last year. The online game aims to introduce children to basic notions of disaster risk reduction in a fun and entertaining way. The UN ISDR secretariat developed the game based on the great success of the board game “Riskland” which was developed jointly with UNICEF. A CD version of “Stop Disasters” will be also available in French for non internet users. The game is available free online at: www.stopdisastersgame.org

Other campaign events will also take place in Brussels (Belgium), Kobe (Japan), Bangkok (Thailand), Dushanbe (Tajikistan) and Panama (Central America). More information about those events and about the International Day for Disaster Reduction is available on the ISDR special webpage at: www.unisdr.org/iddr-2007