Climate change declared public enemy No. 1

Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (left), President of the Republic of Indonesia and Co-Chair of the Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, presents the Panel’s report to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

By Denis McClean

GENEVA, 6 June 2013 - The Head of UNISDR, Margareta Wahlström, today welcomed the emphasis placed on the links between poverty reduction and disaster risk reduction in the report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda which identifies climate change as the main obstacle in the way of ending extreme poverty.

Ms. Wahlström said: "The report puts reducing disaster risk centre stage in the Post-2015 Development Agenda debate. The timing is especially welcome as it reinforces the recommendations which came out of last month's 4th Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction.

"Both processes recognize that the economic and social costs of disasters impact disproportionately on the poor. We also welcome the endorsement of a multi-stakeholder approach as we have been pursuing for a decade now through the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. Determined and consistent risk management is vital to the realization of the High-Level Panel's goal of eradicating extreme poverty by 2030."

She repeated a key finding from the recently published Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction that trillions of dollars of new business investment in the coming years will determine the future face of disaster risk and determine whether economic losses from disasters continue to rise.

"The relationship between business investment practices and disaster risk is poorly understood. We need to be more ambitious in setting measurable and achievable targets when we agree on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. We also need to understand better the ripple effects which a disaster in one part of the world can have in another whether it's the disruption of supply chains or a rise in food prices."

The Report -- A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development -- describes how in the context of a world where 1.2
billion account for 1% of world consumption and the billion richest consume 72%, climate change is the one trend "which will determine whether or not we can deliver on our ambitions."

It continues: "Scientific evidence of the direct threat from climate change has mounted. The stresses of unsustainable production and consumption patterns have become clear, in areas like deforestation, water scarcity, food waste, and high carbon emissions.

"Losses from natural disasters -- including drought, floods and storms -- have increased at an alarming rate. People living in poverty will suffer first and worst from climate change. The cost of taking action now will be much less than the cost of dealing with the consequences later."

Under a set of five priority transformations, the High-Level Panel says the new agenda must tackle the causes of poverty, exclusion and inequality.

It states: "A focus on the poorest and most marginalized, a disproportionate number of whom are women, follows directly from the principles agreed to in the Millennium Declaration and at Rio. These principles should remain the foundation of the post-2015 agenda."

An example of the potential impact of the "New Global Partnership" is stated as "220 million fewer people who suffer the crippling effects of natural disasters."

The Report concludes with a set of Illustrative Goals and Targets including Goal 1: End Poverty which includes covering X% of people who are poor and vulnerable with social protection systems and building resilience and reducing deaths from natural disasters by X%.

The High-Level Panel notes: "No one is more vulnerable than people in poverty to desertification, deforestation and overfishing, or less able to cope with floods, storms, and droughts. Natural disasters can pull them into a cycle of debt and illness, to further degradation of the land, and a fall deeper into poverty."

Security of tenure and social assistance programmes are cited as important means of building resilience as well as meeting basic needs such as health, education, water, sanitation, electricity, freedom to access information and participation in civic life.