

UN Secretary-General: Building disaster risk reduction capacities crucial as vulnerability grows

- Date: 11 Aug 2009
- Source(s): United Nations (UN)

Following are UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's remarks at the opening of the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) office and the ISDR Training Centre for Urban Risk Reduction in Incheon, Republic of Korea, today, 11 August:

Thank you for your hospitality and warm welcome. Let me begin by expressing my appreciation for the leadership and commitment of the Korean National Emergency Management Authority (NEMA) and Incheon Metropolitan City.

Today we open the United Nations new centre for disaster relief in Incheon. But it will not be the only United Nations center in this globally-minded city. Incheon already hosts two other bodies related to the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. I see this as an eloquent sign of the city's deepening ties with the United Nations and its commitment to the ideals that bind us.

It is no accident that Mayor Ahn Sang-soo has been honoured with the prestigious Woodrow Wilson Award for Public Service. Mr. Mayor, I believe this is a testament to your own visionary leadership and global citizenship in pursuing development in an environmentally sustainable way. I hope your example will be emulated by many local governments around the world. Mr. Mayor, you truly deserve this award. Please accept my heartfelt congratulations.

With the opening of this centre, we are sending a strong signal from both the Republic of Korea and the United Nations: Disaster risk reduction is a priority for all. Asia is the most vulnerable place in the world for disasters triggered by natural hazards. In 2008, Asia was hit hard. Nearly 140,000 people died in the Myanmar cyclone Nargis. More than 5 million homes collapsed in the earthquake in China.

We know that prevention is better than cure. Yet too often, there is a tendency to defer action until after disasters occur. Building risk reduction capacities and raising public awareness is crucial. The ISDR Education and Training Centre for Urban Risk Reduction marks an important step forward. And it comes at the right time.

People, poverty and disaster risk are increasingly concentrated in cities. Climate risk is adding a new risk dimension. Some cities that were well planned 25 years ago are now

experiencing yearly floods. Rapid urban growth is increasing vulnerability as cities cannot provide adequate infrastructure and services to keep up with demand.

More than 1 billion people worldwide live in informal settlements. That number is mushrooming by more than 25 million each year. Our large cities are the most vulnerable to floods and hurricanes. This Office and Centre will enhance the capacity of city government officials and professionals to better analyse, assess and manage emerging risks from a changing climate. They will also promote innovative approaches to equip a new generation of urban planners and city managers with state-of-the art knowledge of risk-sensitive urban development.

Today's opening underlines Asian leadership in advancing the disaster risk reduction agenda. Addressing urban risk is also recognized at the global level. In fact, the 2010-2011 World Disaster Reduction Campaign will focus on making cities safer from disasters. There is broad consensus that implementing the globally endorsed Hyogo Framework is critical to saving lives and livelihoods. This Centre and Office will be integral to meeting that goal.

Thank you once again for your leadership and vision.