



United Nations
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PRESS RELEASE

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UN rings the alarm on health cost of disasters

This year's International Day for Disaster Reduction falls on the third anniversary of the South Asian Earthquake. On this day three years ago, 73% of health facilities were destroyed in the affected area of Pakistan, making them unable to function when they were most needed, as millions of people were being affected.

To mark the International Day and promote the *World Disaster Reduction Campaign: Hospitals Safe from Disasters* launched this year, the UN's disaster reduction secretariat UNISDR and the WHO are urging governments to invest more in hospital safety.

"We must build health centres and systems to withstand natural hazards and major emergencies," said WHO Director-General Dr Margaret Chan. "If we don't, lives will be lost needlessly - both when hazards strike and in their aftermath." A high level panel discussion to call for more action, "Saving Lives: hospitals and schools safe from disasters," is being held today in New York, organized by UNISDR and supported by WHO and the World Bank.

"Vulnerable health facilities are a major drain on national finances," says Salvano Briceño, UNISDR Director. "The immediate cost of disaster damage to health systems can deal serious blows to national budgets - but only a 4% initial investment in disaster protection can make most health facilities safe."

In the area of Myanmar affected by Cyclone Nargis, 57% of all health facilities suffered damage and one in five was completely destroyed, which will cost the country US\$12 million in rebuilding alone. During China's Wenchuan Earthquake, 11,028 medical institutions were damaged - repairing them and completely rebuilding 169 hospitals is part of an overall US\$150 billion recovery budget.

John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator will invite today government representatives in New York to hear from countries that suffered major disasters. Speakers will include Professor Zhang Xiulan, Head of the Wenchuan Earthquake Recovery Taskforce, Director of the Institute of Social Development and Public Policy, Beijing Normal University, Mr Dhar Chakrabarti, Executive Director of the National Institute of Disaster Management of India and His Excellency Elton Georges, former Deputy Governor of the British Virgin Islands.

Also today, a global website of the *World Disaster Reduction Campaign: Hospitals Safe from Disasters* will be launched at www.safehospitals.info, providing more information about the campaign and how to contribute.

For more about the event in New York contact: Elina Palm, New York Liaison Office UNISDR Secretariat at: +1 917 367 8107 or via e mail:palm@un.org.