

Acknowledgements

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In 2001 the ISDR Secretariat conducted a global survey on disaster risk reduction, with questionnaires circulated to national authorities requesting for self-assessment of their institutional and policy development, risk assessments and planning. An international advisory panel comprising experts in disaster reduction provided guidance for the preparation of the review throughout 2001-2002.

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Based on the above, a preliminary version was released in July 2002, generating a range of additional comments and contributions from all over the world.

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Foreword

While many people are aware of the terrible impact of disasters throughout the world, few realize that this is a problem that we can do something about. This report, *Living with Risk: A Global Review of Disaster Reduction Initiatives*, should help to change that. It contains many examples of action by individuals, communities and governments, not only to reduce the risks and impacts of natural and technological hazards, but also to avoid creating those risks in the first place.

The scale of the problem is enormous. Disasters arising from floods, droughts, storms, earthquakes, fires and other events create great human misery and crippling economic losses. In 2002 alone, there were more than 500 disasters, which killed more than 10,000 people, affected 600 million others and caused \$55 billion in total damages and \$13 billion in insured losses. Disasters are also diverting precious resources away from efforts in developing countries to escape from poverty.

Communities will always face natural hazards. But hazards only become disasters when lives and livelihoods are swept away, mainly as a result of human activities. The vulnerability and what disaster analysts call "risk burdens" of communities and countries are being increased through a myriad of everyday development decisions at individual, local, national and international levels. For example, populations are too often being concentrated in risky areas such as flood plains. In addition, the destruction of forests and wetlands is harming the capacity of the environment to withstand hazards. Looming above all this is the threat of global climate change and rising sea levels as a result of increased greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere caused by human activity.

This report, coordinated by the secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), reflects a comprehensive effort by the United Nations system to review disaster reduction initiatives throughout the world. I hope it will contribute to more informed decision-making, including improved planning, better regulatory mechanisms and, most of all, innovation in development and environmental protection activities. A key recommendation of the report is that disaster risk reduction should be an integral part of all sustainable development projects and policies. Such an approach would further the objectives of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, and enhance efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Disasters are a problem that we can and must reduce. I commend this publication to all involved in the effort to build resilient communities and nations in our hazard-filled planet.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. Annan".

Kofi A. Annan
Secretary-General
United Nations