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## PRESS RELEASE

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### World Environment Day

#### Ecosystems degradation together with climate change will make disasters worse

*5 June 2009-* "Ecosystems are the very stuff of life, vital to every living organism on earth. Countries around the world must act with much greater urgency to safeguard our ecosystems or face the consequence of more livelihood destruction and increased vulnerability for communities already threatened by disaster", says Margareta Wahlström, the UN's Assistant Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction in an intervention to mark the World Environment Day (WED).

Healthy ecosystems are crucial to reduce disaster impacts and their rapid degradation contributes significantly to the worsening impact of weather-related hazard, she adds: "They provide natural barriers against floods and storm surges and are essential to mitigate weather related disasters that are expected to be even more frequent and severe in the future".

The recently launched Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction: Risk and Poverty in a Changing Climate identified ecosystems degradation as a key driver for disasters. In particular, the Report stressed that while communities have modified ecosystems to suit economic demands, these modifications have come at the cost of other services provided by healthy ecosystems. In Peru for example, new roads leading from the eastern slopes of the Andes into the central Amazonas region have been built in order to push the agricultural frontier eastwards. These actions have led to a notable increase in the number of reported landslides in that region since the 1980s.

The theme 'Your Planet Needs You-UNite to Combat Climate Change' chosen by UNEP for its WED 2009: reflects the pressing global need for countries to agree on a new deal at the crucial climate convention meeting in Copenhagen. It also emphasizes the links with poverty reduction and improved management of forests. UNISDR is supporting the many events organized by UNEP from 3 to 7 June around the world and in particular the release of the new Yan Arthus Bertrand's film called "Home" in Geneva on 7 June.

"This outstanding film raises awareness on essential risk reduction actions we should take now to safeguard the planet for existing and future generations - a clear and present moral responsibility for today's world," stresses Wahlström.

The forthcoming Global Platform on Disaster Risk Reduction from 16 to 19 June will dedicate a full session on the role of Ecosystems management in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction together with UNEP on 17 June from 16.30 to 18.30 at the Geneva International Conference Centre, targeting the implementation of more concrete measures to preserve and strengthen ecosystems in the future.