



PRESS RELEASE

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Panama Launching of the World Disaster Reduction Campaign 2008-2009: 'Hospitals Safe from Disasters' – Reducing Risk, Protecting Health Facilities and Saving Lives Panama City, Panama; March 11, 2008.

The auditorium of the Saint Thomas Hospital in the Panamanian capital set the scene for today's¹ launching of the World Disaster Reduction Campaign "Hospitals Safe from Disasters". With over 200 people in attendance, participants in this event included Dr. Cirilo Lawson, National Director of Health, in representation of the Health Minister Dr. Rosario Turner; Dr. Roberto Velasquez Abood, Director of the National System of Civil Protection (SINAPROC for its acronym in Spanish); Dr. Dave Zervaas, Regional Coordinator for the Americas of the United Nations, secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (UN/ISDR); and Dr. Guadalupe Verdejo, Representative of the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) in Panama.

The focus of the current biannual World Campaign is on the structural safety of hospitals and health facilities, on maintaining health facilities operational during and after the occurrence of a disastrous event, and on building the capacity of health personnel to be better prepared to deal with the possible effects of natural hazards.

As stated by Dr. Zervaas, "international recognition now exists that efforts towards disaster risk reduction must go hand-in-hand with plans, policies, and programs aimed at sustainable development, poverty reduction, good governance and the creation of strategic alliances".

It has been estimated that the incorporation of mitigation measures into the design and construction of a new hospital represents less than 4 percent of the total initial investment, retrofitting of a hospital's contents and equipment costs a mere 1 percent; and yet such small investments could protect up to 90 percent of the total value.

Within the framework of this campaign, the secretariat of the UN/ISDR along with the World Health Organization (WHO) and their respective regional offices will carry out a wide variety of activities. These activities will be implemented in collaboration with other partners of the ISDR system, in particular the World Bank, other UN agencies, the IFRC and Red Cross representative offices, NGO networks supported by the ISDR secretariat, the private sector, academic institutions, policy-makers and local authorities.

¹ March 11