

# United Nations 1998 World Disaster Reduction Campaign

## Prevention begins with information

### *Natural Disaster Prevention and the Media*

The United Nations World Disaster Reduction Campaigns, organised by the IDNDR Secretariat, are designed to make people aware, world-wide and across all professional and social sectors, of what they can do to protect their countries and communities from natural hazards.

The campaigns are based on a different theme each year, and various activities are organised as part of them. Campaign events are designed to build local capacity and system-wide commitment (locally, nationally, regionally and internationally) to reducing the impact of natural disasters.

Each campaign culminates on United Nations World Disaster Reduction Day, which is celebrated on the second Wednesday of October.

This year, the United Nations World Disaster Reduction Day will be celebrated world-wide on 14 October 1998. The theme is 'Natural Disaster Prevention and the Media' and its slogan is 'Prevention begins with Information'.

#### **Why focus on information and the media?**

The aim of the 1998 United Nations World Disaster Reduction Campaign is to enlist the media as working partners in promoting natural disaster prevention measures.

The well functioning of modern society is based on the good and fast circulation of information. This is even more relevant in the case of a society vulnerable to natural hazards. Their accurate information and its regular delivery is of importance in all sectors of decision-making as people's lives and assets are at stake.

The ability to reduce social and economic risks from natural hazards requires the adoption of a global culture of prevention based on information and its widespread communication.

Information (collection, production and dissemination) and communication media are therefore a crucial link in the chain of sound natural disaster prevention measures and awareness building. Only then can a society vulnerable to natural hazards implement healthy sustainable development measures

which will allow for economic growth and national development.

Over recent years, countries and communities over the world have repeatedly been reminded of the devastating force of natural disasters. All sectors of society have noted with concern the growing vulnerability of humankind and their poverty to natural and environmental hazards. At least three million people have lost their lives in disasters during the last 30 years and hundreds of million people have been affected. The recorded economic losses amount to more than US\$240 billion in 1995-1996 alone. In some disaster-prone countries, natural disasters can reduce the GDP by up to ten per cent. More importantly, disasters result in societal disturbances that are becoming more and more unbearable to affected populations. Disasters do not destroy homes and physical property only: they affect livelihood.

#### **How will the 1998 United Nations World Disaster Reduction Campaign be celebrated?**

Activities organised by the IDNDR Secretariat

##### *Virtual conference on the Internet*

The IDNDR Secretariat will hold its third Internet Conference on the theme of 'Natural Disaster Prevention and the Media'. Information on how to join and details of the agenda will follow shortly.

##### *Photo contest*

The IDNDR Secretariat is organising a worldwide photo contest. Send your best photos of natural disasters, natural disaster prevention measures and illustrations of media and communications' related issues to the Secretariat by 15 September 1998. The IDNDR Secretariat will use the material for an exhibit in Geneva, and the winners will have their works published by Stop Disasters magazine. The top three entries will receive prizes from the IDNDR Secretariat.

##### *International activities on 14 October 1998*

On World Disaster Reduction Day, important celebrations will take place in

the United Nations. The Sasakawa Disaster Prevention Award (created to promote humanitarian efforts to assist those affected by natural disasters) will be handed to the 1998 winner. There will also be an international press conference. A list of relevant activities which are part of the final phase of IDNDR (1998-1999) for background information and discussion will be mailed to you separately.

All countries are encouraged to undertake similar activities at the national and local level.

Activities organised by other UN agencies and partners

The UN World Disaster Reduction Campaigns are led by the IDNDR Secretariat. Many United Nations agencies host and programme activities to celebrate the Day. In 1998, preliminary discussions for closer collaboration on the campaign have been held with WMO and UNESCO.

Further participating partners include UN Resident Coordinators, IDNDR National Committees, international and regional organisations, scientific associations, universities, companies, and NGOs which have sustained contact with the IDNDR Secretariat. These partners adapt the global campaign locally, nationally or regionally according to the major natural threats, the existing socio-economic vulnerabilities and resources.

#### **Local activities guidelines**

##### *Build partnerships with national and local media*

Contact your local and national printed, audio and audio-visual media. Send them information (use the support material listed below) on natural disaster prevention. In conjunction with the media bodies in question, work out the main areas at stake in the role of the media versus the issue of natural disaster prevention in your country, what the problems have been in the past and what solutions might be appropriate for the future. Compile this information and send it to the IDNDR Secretariat by 15 September 1998. Your research will be

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