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PRESS RELEASE

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DISASTER FIGURES FOR 2007¹

Asia continues to be hit hardest by disasters

2007 saw a marked increase in the number of floods compared with the average of the last seven years, and Asia was the continent hit hardest by disasters according to figures released today by the Belgian WHO collaborating Center for Research on Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED). The yearly figures were released today in a press conference co-organized by the secretariat of the International Strategy for Disaster reduction (UN/ISDR) in Geneva.

Eight out of the 10 countries with the highest disaster deaths of 2007 were in Asia, with 4,234 killed in Bangladesh by cyclone Sidr last November, and more than 3,000 fatalities from severe floods in Bangladesh, India, North Korea and China.

Despite the record number of deaths in Asia, deaths due to disasters in 2007 were lower than the 2000-2006 yearly average, a period which included at least five major disasters of unusual impact. In 2007, some 16,517 people were killed compared to the average 73,931 between 2000 and 2006.

However, the number of people affected by disasters continued to increase and floods remain the main disaster that affects populations in the world. More than 164 million people were affected by floods in 2007 out of the 197 million affected by disasters and half of them were caused by the June-July floods in China.

"Current trends are consistent with the predictions of the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change, in that Asia, and also West Africa are already suffering from more severe and frequent floods," says Professor Debarati Guha-Sapir, director of CRED.

Regarding disaster occurrence, 399 disasters were recorded last year, which was close to the 2000-2006 average (394).

¹ Epidemics, insect infestations and technological disasters are not included

Another key point highlighted by the CRED report is the high economic impact that disasters are having on developed countries such as Japan, the United States, and European countries. In a big jump on 2006, disaster losses cost US\$62.5 billion in 2007, due in large part to high value assets in developed countries hit by disasters.

Japan's earthquake last July cost US\$12.5 billion. Europe's Windstorm Kyrill, which killed 47 people, resulted in US\$10 billion in losses, half in Germany alone. The two flood waves of June and July in the United Kingdom racked up US\$8 billion altogether, while the huge wildfires which affected California during October in the United States resulted in losses of US\$2.5 billion.

"These figures are a reminder of what could have been saved if we had invested more in disaster risk reduction measures," says Salvano Briceño, Director of the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

Mr Briceño also underlined that despite a lower dollar cost of disasters in poorer areas, the long-term social cost in those cases can be far higher. "Lower insurance and asset losses during disasters that mainly affect poor people, simply show that those people have no safety nets. Low-income people are still struggling in New Orleans after Katrina and in Indian Ocean countries after the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami. We can and must do more to increase the resilience of people who are most vulnerable to disasters."

In terms of other overall trends, "monitoring the associations between weather related disasters and disease transmission will be one of the most significant challenges for the next decade," says Professor Guha-Sapir.

Statistics: Disasters in 2007

Occurrence of disasters: 399

- Total deaths: 16,517
- Total affected: 197 million
- Estimated damage: US\$62.5 billion

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