



## Acknowledgement

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## Note

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*The photo on the front cover "Girls salvaging their ration cards" is by Azizur Rahim Pev of Bangladesh, winner of the 1998 IDNDR International Photo Contest.*

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*Philippines: grade schoolers campaigning on the street during the observance of the 1998 natural disaster conciousness week.*

# Message of the United Nations Secretary-General on the occasion of the International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction, October 8, 1997.

This year's observance of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction shines a spotlight on the role of water in natural disasters. Earthquakes, cyclones and volcanic eruptions may be among the most dramatic natural hazards, but water-related disasters - from floods and drought to desertification - affect more people and cause more damage. Indeed, with the "El Niño" phenomenon currently causing both flooding in Peru and drought in Indonesia, the focus on water is especially timely.

Floods are occurring more frequently than other disasters, a trend attributable to many causes, including deforestation and rapid development, especially in urban areas. However, drought and desertification are also on the rise. Drought is also a leading killer, causing the deaths of a reported 74,000 people in 1996. Desertification affects one fourth of all the earth's land and more than one billion of the world's people, and costs US\$42 billion each year in lost productivity. Here, too, deforestation is a major contributing factor, along with other poor land use practices such as over-grazing, over-cultivation and mismanagement of irrigation.

The United Nations is fully engaged in efforts to help countries cope with natural disasters and incorporate disaster reduction and preparedness into their overall development plans. In 1989, as a spur to international action and cooperation, the General Assembly proclaimed the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (1990 - 2000). Throughout the 1990's, the United Nations conferences on the environment, human settlements and other issues stressed the links between disaster reduction and sustainable development.

Since the World Conference for Natural Disaster Reduction, held in 1994 in Yokohama, Japan, many countries have adopted new laws and national strategies for disaster reduction, preparedness and mitigation. The United

Nations, for its part, has carried out disaster management programmes in dozens of countries, focusing on institution-building, early warning, networking between institutions and individuals, and the production and dissemination of training materials. When disaster strikes, the Organization arranges for relief shipments, launches international appeals for assistance and serves as a clearinghouse for information about needs and consequences.

We face a paradox with water-related disasters: too much water, and too little. Virtually every country faces the prospect of both flood and water shortage. Moreover, such disasters know no borders; floods and droughts often affect several countries at once.

The case for international cooperation is clear. So is the humanitarian imperative: reducing the loss of life, property damage, and economic and social disruptions caused by natural disasters and environmental emergencies. So let us pledge, on the occasion of International Day for Disaster Reduction 1997, to intensify our work of promoting an ethos of disaster prevention in order to build a safer world for the 21st century.

# Secretary-General calls for sustained commitment to safer world in message on 1998 Natural Disaster Reduction Day.

NEW YORK - Following is the text of Secretary-General Kofi Annan's message on the occasion of the International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction, observed this year on 14 October:

Almost daily, we are reminded of the threat of natural disasters. Since the beginning of the year, we have endured catastrophic floods in Asia, deadly hurricanes in the Americas and the serious consequences of El Niño on several continents. But, while we cannot stop the forces of nature, we can and must prevent them from turning into major social and economic disasters.

Natural hazards capture the imagination, and we tend to think of them in terms of the dramatic images we see on television, but the true extent of their impact lies elsewhere. They profoundly affect our efforts to achieve sustainable development. By their powerful impact on the supply of primary commodities, they disrupt market stability, leading to tremendous declines in national revenue. In many developing countries, 5 per cent of gross national product may be lost to natural disasters each year. In the United States of America, damage caused by natural hazards is estimated, on average, to reach \$ 1 billion per week.

We can no longer afford, financially or socially, to rely only on the expectations of relief when disaster strikes. Preparedness measures for more efficient rescue operations will remain necessary, but we must first turn much greater attention to the introduction of preventive strategies aimed at saving lives and protecting assets before they are lost. The programme for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction, adopted by the General Assembly in 1989 and refined at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction in Yokohama in 1994, provides us with the necessary guidelines for action.

Science and technology play a central role in reducing the economic and social conse-

quences of natural hazards. This year's observance of the International Day highlights the importance of information in communicating these technical abilities and in sharing practical experiences to make communities safer. As more and more countries incorporate disaster prevention policies into national development plans, they are focusing on the value of improved risk assessments and timely and effective early warning, as well as trying to enlist the help of educators, non-governmental organizations, civil society institutions and private sector enterprises, such as insurance companies. Agencies of the United Nations system, such as the World Meteorological Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Bank, have been particularly active in contributing their technical expertise to this cause.

Prevention begins with information. On this International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction, I wish to encourage the widest possible partnership, communication and exchange of information among all groups of society and all nations to ensure a sustained commitment to a safer world, a world more resilient to the impact of natural hazards and disasters

**Water**  
 too much

**Leading cause  
 of natural disasters**

Building a culture of prevention • 1997 World Disaster Reduction Campaign

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**PREVENTION BEGINS  
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