

## Asia-Pacific most prone to natural disasters but lacks preparedness – UN report



A powerful earthquake hit northwest China's Qinghai Province on 14 April 2010

26 October 2010 – Countries in Asia and the Pacific are more prone to natural disasters than those in other parts of the world, with people in the region four times more likely to be affected by natural catastrophe than those in Africa and 25 times more vulnerable than Europeans or North Americans, a United Nations report **released** today shows.

Future disaster risk reduction strategies in the region should be considered within broader development frameworks and multisectoral budgetary processes that address economic inequities and social and environmental imbalances, according to the study, which was unveiled at the 4th Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Incheon, Republic of Korea.

The first of its kind, the Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2010 – prepared by the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (**ESCAP**) and the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (**UNISDR**) – notes that natural disasters had disproportionate impacts on human development in the region.

The region lacked comprehensive natural disasters assessment capacity, the reports notes, adding that while it generated one quarter of the world's gross domestic product (GDP), it accounted for 85 per cent of deaths and 42 per cent of global economic losses due to natural disasters.

In a video **message** to the Conference, **Secretary-General** Ban Ki-moon stressed the need to include disaster risk in national development policies and strategies on climate change.

"There are proven ways to reduce risks and cope with the aftermath of a disaster – compulsory and routine risk assessments ... environmental protection ... sound urban planning and building codes ... early warning systems ... public education and insurance," Mr. Ban told delegates.

The report considers the socio-economic impact of disasters, and suggests ways of reducing vulnerability to disasters to protect development gains. It emphasizes that disaster losses are linked to and exacerbated by poverty, and that the vulnerability of the poor stems from multifaceted socio-economic and environmental imbalances.

"Unless these imbalances are addressed, people who are constantly exposed to disaster risk are more likely to remain poor and more vulnerable to disasters, perpetuating a vicious cycle from which it is extremely difficult to break free," said Noeleen Heyzer, the Executive Secretary of ESCAP, in a joint statement with Margareta Wahlström, the UN Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction.

During the conference, ESCAP will also organize a technical session on disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.

The conference follows the one-day pre-conference event on 24 October which looked into introducing innovative tools for reducing the impact of typhoon-related disasters in the region.

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