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As risks from disasters rise, UN chief calls for better preparedness



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[Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon today called for accelerated efforts to strengthen the capacity to withstand disasters across the world, saying the destruction wrought by such events can be avoided or mitigated by enhancing resilience through technology and other measures aimed at boosting preparedness.

“We must accelerate our efforts. The world’s vulnerability to disaster risks is growing faster than our ability to increase resilience,” Mr. Ban [told](#) the Third Session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in Geneva, which opened today.

“As a result of global climate change, weather-related hazards are on the rise. Nuclear safety and the threat of multiple hazards add an even greater sense of urgency,” said the Secretary-General.

No development effort will be equitable or sustainable unless disaster and climate risk measures are a part of the picture.

He called for the broadening of the coalition of national and local leaders promoting disaster risk reduction across the world.

“Disaster risk reduction is everyone’s business,” said Mr. Ban, adding that the United Nations, as the “global first responder to disaster and crises,” will continue to integrate disaster risk reduction and preparedness, as well as climate change adaptation measures, into its work around the world.

He stressed the need to “risk-proof development,” saying that the economies of the world’s least developed countries were the most affected when disasters strike because of their higher vulnerability as a result of poverty, weather variability and climate change.

“No development effort will be equitable or sustainable unless disaster and climate risk measures are a part of the picture.”

The Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction was established in 2007 as a biennial forum for information exchange and partnership building across sectors to improve implementation of disasters risk reduction strategies through better communication and coordination among stakeholders.

The theme of this year’s forum is “Invest today for a safer tomorrow: Increase investment in local action.” More than 2,500 representatives from governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society and the private sector are attending the forum.

An added dimension of the conference is the World Reconstruction Conference, organized by the World Bank and the UN, and held at the same venue. It constitutes one of the main pillars of the Global Platform.

A new global report on disaster risk reduction launched at the forum shows that taking disaster losses into consideration is the first step towards taking responsibility for disaster risk.

“Although countries are strengthening risk governance capacities and reducing vulnerability, this is not happening quickly or effectively enough – increases in exposure have meant increases in risk,” according to the document, entitled “2011 Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction – Revealing Risks, Redefining Development.”

In higher-income countries, the risk of losing wealth in a disaster is now increasing faster than that wealth is being created, according to the report.

The report recommends the following measures for governments to strengthen disaster risk preparedness:

- To ensure the coherence of policy and planning, overall responsibility for disaster risk management needs to be located in a central ministry with a high level of political authority.
- Where local capacities are limited, an incremental approach to decentralization may be the best way forward.
- The right to information on disaster risks is central to creating social demand and accountability.
- Engaging citizens and affected communities requires a shift in the culture of public administration.

On a positive note, the report found that mortality risks associated with major weather-related hazards is now declining globally, including in Asia, where most of the risks are concentrated. In most of the world, the risk of being killed by a tropical cyclone or a major river flood is lower today than it was in 1990.

However, mortality risk for all weather-related hazards continues to be concentrated in poor with weak governance.

At a [news conference](#) in Geneva after the report's launch, the Secretary-General highlighted that much of the damage from disasters is the result of frequent, but less severe and extensive events, rather than less-frequent intensive catastrophes.

“That underscores the value of advance planning. Often, this planning is not a matter of spending more, but of using resources more wisely. “We know what works. Good building design. Proper land use planning. Public education. Community preparedness. Effective early warning systems. Focusing on the needs and potential of women – the largest untapped resource for change,” said Mr. Ban.

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