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## UN seeks to improve safety of schools and hospitals in natural disasters



The main hospital in Padang, Indonesia, was severely damaged by the 2009 earthquake

9 April 2010 – The United Nations has launched a worldwide campaign to enhance the safety of 1 million schools and hospitals, where poor construction, an absence of safety drills and lack of emergency equipment can lead to the highest death tolls during earthquakes and other disasters.

“Making sure that schools, hospitals and other key public infrastructure meet certain safety standards are key steps to ensure that natural hazards do not turn into disasters,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction Margareta Wahlström said of the campaign, launched yesterday in Manila in the Philippines.

The One Million Safe Schools and Hospitals Campaign, sponsored by the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction ([UNISDR](#)), aims to raise public awareness and mobilize resources for a host of tasks ranging from repairing and retrofitting buildings to relocating to safer sites and constructing new safe ones where necessary, to purchasing safety equipment such as fire extinguishers and first aid kits.

“People in unsafe schools, hospitals and health facilities are at the greatest risk of losing their lives,” UNISDR said. “Children in schools and the sick in hospitals and health facilities are the most vulnerable people in times of disaster.” It cited the

potential effects of climate change, with vulnerable countries facing increased risks of devastating storms and flooding.

The statistics speak volumes. Thousands of children were reported killed when their schools collapsed in a quake in southwest China in 2008. Some 17,000 children died and 2,448 schools collapsed in the 2005 earthquake in Kashmir, India.

Last September, tropical storm Ondoy (Ketsana) brought down a total of 42 primary and secondary schools in the Manila metropolitan area, with damage reaching \$1.6 million. In the same month a 7.6-magnitude earthquake in Sumatra, Indonesia, heavily damaged two private hospitals and affected 270,000 other buildings. In October, typhoon Pepeng damaged some 30 private and public hospitals and 100 health centres in the Philippines.

At yesterday's launch, attended by government officials from the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), UNISDR and UN World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) officials, and other disaster risk reduction partners, pledges were sought for the Philippines and other ASEAN states, but the global action is part of the new 2010-2011 World Disaster Reduction Campaign – entitled *Making Cities resilient* – that will be launched next month in Bonn, Germany.

Beyond financial resources, the campaign seeks to involve students, parents, teachers, patients, doctors and nurses, communities, organizations and institutions, local and national governments, and business groups and corporations, as well as donors, in tasks ranging from distributing brochures to conducting seminars to organizing emergency drills in schools and hospitals.

"Individual commitments are as important as mutual commitments," Ms Wahlström said. The campaign's slogan – "Make a Pledge, Save a Life" – encourages everybody, from individuals, families and community to organizations, corporations and governments to join.

"This campaign is unique because it offers people from all walks of life the opportunity to protect their hospitals and schools, and in turn save lives," said WHO Assistant Director-General for Health Action in Crises, Eric Laroche. "Members of the public, governments, health workers and hospital staff can all find a way to actively support this initiative to make one million hospitals and schools safe from disasters."

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