



## Majority of disaster deaths in 2009 climate-related, says UN



Rescue teams evacuate trapped victims in the aftermath of the 30 September 2009 earthquake in Indonesia

14 December 2009 – More than three quarters of those people who died in disasters this year lost their lives to extreme weather events, which caused nearly \$15 billion in damages worldwide, the top United Nations official on disaster risk reduction announced today.

Preliminary figures for the period from January to the end of November 2009 show that 224 of the 245 disasters were weather-related, and accounted for 55 million out of 58 million people affected.

Data shows that the number of people killed in disasters is falling because countries are better prepared and have better early warning systems, Margareta Wahlström, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction, **told reporters** in Copenhagen, Denmark, where the historic UN summit on climate change is under way.

"But the cost of disasters are equally, steadily going up very dramatically from the 1980s into this decade, and that increase is continuing year by year," she stressed.

For poorer nations, they have seen costs jump from \$10 billion to \$15 billion annually, Ms. Wahlström pointed out, while wealthier countries have experienced a cost surge from \$20 billion per year to well over \$70 billion.

She noted that droughts – the most "complicated" of disasters to capture in statistics are not well-represented in the results announced today.

"It is a major hazard, and it's a slow-moving one that kills people through bad health, malnutrition, disease and undermines livelihoods," the official said.

For example, in Africa, droughts accounts for less than 20 per cent of reported disasters, but represents 80 per cent of all people affected.

Addressing the same press conference, Michel Jarraud, Secretary-General of the UN World Meteorological Organization (**WMO**), said that while natural hazards cannot be prevented, "we can provide the right information to prevent these extreme events [from turning into] disasters."

With climate change being one of the complicating factors in hazards, "we know with great likelihood that a number of these disasters are likely or very likely to become more intense or more frequent," he added.

He underscored that while climate information is crucial for analyzing hazard patterns, the past is no longer a good indicator to plan for the future given changing patterns, such as sea level rise, triggered by climate change.

For his part, Olav Kjørven, Assistant Administrator of the UN Development Programme (**UNDP**), stressed that climate-related natural disasters are not humanitarian catastrophes, but seriously jeopardize development gains.

"There is no doubt that they threaten the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals [**MDGs**], the time-bound targets that we have set for ourselves," but they also could result in setbacks to affect generations to come, he said.

**News Tracker: past stories on this issue**

Climate change threatening survival of Himalayan communities – UN report