



**UN NEWS CENTRE**

With breaking stories and  
newswire products from



## **Heavy snows in Europe underline need to prepare for climate hazards – UN official**



Margareta Wahlström, Assistant Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction

13 December 2010 – The heavy snowfall that recently immobilised cities in Europe is an indication that the world may be ill prepared to cope with unpredictable climate patterns, a senior United Nations said today, calling for greater efforts to improve readiness to respond to extreme weather events.

“National meteorological services in Europe did well to issue warnings, but being prepared goes beyond prediction,” said Margareta Wahlström, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Disaster Risk Reduction. “A complete and effective early warning system also requires planners to understand the risks they face, so that they are able to respond appropriately,” she said.

Parts of France and the United Kingdom were hit by heavy snowfall last week that stranded commuters in their vehicles for hours. Between 10 to 20 centimetres of snowfall brought airports to a standstill in many cities, including Geneva, Paris, London and Berlin. Throughout Europe, thousands of households suffered power outages.

Ms. Wahlström said that effective early warning entails the ability to understand risk, good forecasting systems, maintaining effective communication channels, and adequate capacity to respond.

She said that warnings by local meteorological offices only complement a local disaster preparedness strategy. Even more necessary for saving lives and assets is a better understanding of what makes citizens vulnerable, she stressed.

“We are encouraging local authorities to recognize the risks unique to their community,” Ms. Wahlström said, referring to the ‘Making Cities Resilient’ campaign that the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) and its partners launched in May. More than 150 cities have joined the campaign.

“We recognize that local governments are at the frontline when disasters strike. They are the ones who must set a budget, outline roles and responsibilities and conduct risk assessments,” she said.

UNISDR plans to convene an international conference in Geneva in May, dubbed the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, and whose focus will be on increasing investment for local resilience.

News Tracker: past stories on this issue

[New UN report outlines measures to prevent losses caused by natural hazards](#)