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PRESS RELEASE

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First global scientific effort to examine the linkages between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation

Panama - More than 90 world experts have assembled today in Panama City to start a new assessment on how climate change will affect disaster risks in future and how countries can better manage the expected increases in damaging weather events due to climate change. The meeting is being convened by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which decided in April 2009 to prepare a new IPCC Special Report called: “Managing the Risk of Extreme Events and Disasters to Advance Climate Change Adaptation”. The assessment was proposed by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) and the government of Norway in response to the predictions in the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report that more frequent and severe extreme events such as droughts, floods, storms, heat waves were likely in the future warmer world.

The experts will undertake an extensive survey of available scientific and technical information over 2010, and their assessment will be delivered in a report to be released in 2011, following worldwide critical technical and governmental review. The assessment is the first global scientific effort to examine the linkages between disaster risk reduction and adaptation to climate change.

The experts will assess measures that governments and people can take to build resilience to weather and climate hazards and examine practices, strategies and approaches that communities can use to adapt to climate change. The IPCC team combines the forces of economists, sociologists, risk analysts, hydrologists, agricultural experts, health researchers, and risk reduction practitioners alongside climate scientists, drawn from a wide range of developing and developed countries.

“The IPCC Special Report is a collective effort that will shine a spotlight on the working policies and tools that people have been using for years to manage and adapt to natural variations of the climate. It will inform Governments about what works best to reduce disaster risks and manage extreme events, and how to cut down on future losses of lives and assets,” says Margareta Wahlström, UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction.

The decision to carry out the assessment marks a new realization that disaster risk reduction will be a first line of defence in adapting to climate change. Climate change negotiators preparing for the Copenhagen Climate Conference have already penciled in the need for disaster risk reduction strategies and risk management and the importance of the Hyogo Framework for Action – a ten-year blueprint for reducing risks to disasters worldwide. The Special Report will provide authoritative guidance on how to move ahead in proven practical terms.

Climate change adaptation measures such as introduction and wider use of drought-resistant seed and the collection of rain water are well-known techniques to deal with drought related risks. Likewise, careful land-use planning and flood management can avoid the high costs of flooding and landslides. The enforcement of safe building codes, conduct of thorough vulnerability and risk assessments, raising public awareness and preparing populations to respond to early warnings, are also among the myriad risk reduction practices that will contribute to adaptation to changing climate.

UNISDR is supporting the IPCC's preparation of the Special Report by making a global search to ferret out the wide range of technical information on the topic and making it more readily available for assessment by IPCC authors. Regional and thematic material on good practice, case studies, operational policies and practices, government publications and other sources will be gathered to complement the traditional academic literature.