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**MESSAGE FOR INTERNATIONAL DISASTER REDUCTION DAY,
OCTOBER 13, 2011,
BY THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL FOR
DISASTER RISK REDUCTION, MARGARETA WAHLSTRÖM.**

October 13, GENEVA: This year on International Disaster Reduction Day, UNISDR and its partners invite children and young people to “Step Up for Disaster Risk Reduction” as the group of people most affected by disasters worldwide.

An estimated 100 million young people are affected by reported disasters each year and thousands of them are killed and injured.

We know from many courageous stories which emerge post-disaster that young people are not passive victims of events beyond their control.

Around the world we have seen the evidence that young people are quick to respond to tragic events.

Whether it's the scouts in Haiti, Red Crescent youth volunteers in Bangladesh or well-drilled schoolchildren in Japan, there is ample evidence that wherever young people are empowered with information and skills training, they are important actors in disaster management and have a keen eye for where risk can be reduced in the community.

This and much more came across in the interviews which were undertaken with over 600 children from 21 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America to prepare the new Children's Charter for Disaster Risk Reduction which was produced by the Children in a Changing Climate coalition of UNICEF, Plan, Save the Children and World Vision.

It is disturbing to learn from the Charter that the majority of children feel completely cut off from any information regarding disasters. This is simply not acceptable when we know that children and young people are among the worst affected by disaster events.

Today we make a special plea to mayors and leaders of over 800 cities and local governments who have signed up to the Ten Essentials of UNISDR's “Making Cities Resilient” Campaign.

It is this. We want them to ensure that they take on board the need to plan for safe schools and child protection in disaster settings. And we remind them that it is easier to plan for disaster risk reduction if young people are involved.

As governments prepare for the Durban negotiations on climate change and the Rio +20 Conference on Sustainable Development next year, we should take note that children are telling us that they are ready and willing to participate in measures to tackle disaster risk and climate change.

These children clearly have a sense that disaster risk is on the rise globally in both developed and developing countries. As we reach the landmark of seven billion people on the planet, we know that more people and more assets are in areas of high risk.

UNISDR's Global Assessment Report 2011 tells us that the proportion of the population living in flood-prone river basins has increased by 114% over the last 30 years and those living on cyclone-exposed coastlines by 192%. More than half the world's large cities, with populations ranging from two to 15 million, are located in areas at high risk of seismic activity.

In light of this, one of the simplest disaster risk reduction measures we can possibly take is to empower young people and to ensure they are actively involved in disaster risk reduction and part of making their cities and communities resilient.

To deny them that right would be to deny them a say in their own future.

The planet needs their touch if it is to survive the threat of climate change and the growing intensification and frequency of disaster events.

About UNISDR

UNISDR is the UN office dedicated to disaster risk reduction. It is led by the Special Representative of the Secretary General for Disaster Risk Reduction and supports implementation of the *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters* which has been adopted by 168 countries and seeks "the substantial reduction of disaster losses, in lives and in the social, economic and environmental assets of communities and countries." Over 130 countries now report on their disaster risk reduction efforts. UNISDR has facilitated the creation of 38 National Disaster Data Bases around the world as part of its on-going global effort to lead and convince governments and the private sector to invest in risk reduction and avoid recurrent disaster losses which waste development resources. It has also mobilised over 800 cities and local governments to take part in the World Disaster Risk Reduction Campaign, *Making Cities Resilient: My City is Getting Ready!* In early 2011, UNISDR supported the initiative by the President of the UN General Assembly to organize the first thematic debate on disaster risk reduction ever held in the UN General Assembly.

For more information about UNISDR visit: www.unisdr.org