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PRESS RELEASE

Brussels/Bonn, September 2, 2011

WorldRiskReport 2011: Can disaster be prevented?

How high is the risk of different countries in the world to become victims of natural hazards and climate change? The WorldRiskReport 2011 provides new answers. On behalf of Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft (Alliance Development Works/Germany), the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) in Bonn/Germany has developed the WorldRiskIndex, a central element of the report. The index calculates risk values for 173 countries worldwide. The Pacific Island state of Vanuatu has the highest ranking, at 32.00 per cent. This indicates that disaster risk is highest; whereas Malta and Qatar, with 0.72 and 0.02 per cent, respectively, show the lowest risk worldwide (Belgium, at 3.51 percent, is ranked at position 140). Today, the WorldRiskReport 2011 was published by Alliance Development Works in Brussels, Belgium.

"Extreme natural events do not necessarily cause disasters, because risk not only depends on the hazard, but is very much determined by social and economic factors", explains the Scientific Head of the WorldRiskIndex project at UNU-EHS, PD Dr Jörn Birkmann today at its presentation in Brussels. "The global overall view on a world map shows right away where the exposure of societies to natural hazard is particularly high. In addition, the vulnerability of societies as well as their response capacities is shown in different maps. This is an innovative approach that goes beyond existing hazard maps ", he added.

Peter Mucke, Managing Director of Alliance Development Works, and cooperation partner of the United Nations University, explained further, "the WorldRiskReport shows the need to focus in the future more on disaster risk reduction than just on humanitarian aid after an extreme event. The comprehensive analyses allow to better detect threats and to identify the needs more precisely, as well as to place political demands similarly in affected countries and donor countries" added

Prof. Dr. Jakob Rhyner, Director of the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS), said: "I am pleased that the Institute's expertise has produced such important results for the practical aspect of humanitarian aid and development cooperation. This fully corresponds to the mandate of the United Nations University to conduct research for practice."

The WorldRiskReport shows that disaster risk is always composed of two components: exposure to natural hazards and climate change, on the one hand, and social vulnerability, on the other hand. The report clarifies that disasters cannot be attributed to meteorological or geological phenomena only, but that they are determined also by social structures and processes within a society (such as level of education, extent of poverty, food situation or functioning of governmental institutions).

Thus, for example, the Netherlands and Hungary are relatively high exposed to natural hazards and climate change, but due to their social, economic and ecological situations, they have a comparatively good ranking in the risk index. Similarly, the earthquakes of Haiti and Japan strongly demonstrate this relationship. While 28,000 people died in the Japan earthquake (9.0 on the moment-magnitude scale), 220,000 people died in Haiti in a much weaker earthquake measuring 7.0 on the moment-magnitude scale. Owing to higher coping and adaptive capacities, e.g. building laws, there were significantly fewer victims in Japan.

Background:

The **United Nations University (UNU)** is the academic arm of the United Nations. Through a problem-oriented and interdisciplinary approach, it aims at applied research and education on a global scale. UNU was founded in 1973 as an autonomous organ of the United Nations General Assembly. The University has its headquarters in Tokyo, Japan, and over a dozen institutes and programmes worldwide. UNU-EHS was established in 2003 in Bonn, Germany.

www.ehs.unu.edu;

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The **Alliance Development Works** is an alliance of German development and relief agencies providing long-term aid in the aftermath of major disasters and in emergencies. The association brings together larger and smaller, church and non-church development and relief agencies along with their respective specialties'. Partners are Bread for the World, medico international, MISEREOR, Terre des Hommes Germany and German Agro Action.

www.entwicklung-hilft.de/English.57.0.html

For more information:

WorldRiskReport 2011 fact sheet, printable maps and illustrations can be downloaded at www.worldriskreport.org

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