

Disaster Risk Reduction saves lives – it pays to be prepared for climatic natural disasters

Much of the loss of life in the great cyclone Nargis in Myanmar could have been avoided. Humanitarian organizations urge governments to take action before the disasters hit.

Every year natural disasters are becoming more frequent and the humanitarian consequences of global climate change more devastating. But much could be done to predict storms, floods and droughts and to communicate them effectively, UN Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees L. Craig Johnstone stated Wednesday at public seminar in Copenhagen.

- Much of the loss of life in the great South Asian Tsunami could have been avoided if an alert system had been in place to inform coastal residents of the impending catastrophe which was knowable in many areas a full six hours before the Tsunami struck. So too, in Myanmar that the country was going to be hit by an exceptional storm was known two days before it hit. Much more could have been done. The technologies are there; they need to be harnessed, key note speaker L. Craig Johnstone told participants at the seminar: Linking Climate Change Negotiations and Disaster Risk Reduction organized by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Cooperation with The World Bank, Danish Red Cross and International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.

In the past twenty years the incidence of major storms had doubled from 200 to 400 a year. Disasters caused by flooding have risen from 50 to 200 during that period and the damage is more extensive than previously. Also conflicts in Darfur and Somalia have changing climate as one of the causes.

The delegates coming from North and South discussed how to ensure that mechanisms are prioritized where the most vulnerable population groups live.

- We need to take responsibility and pay and for damages already done, Madeleen Helmer Head of Red Cross Climate Centre in the Hague stated.

Though local governments have to take responsibility much of the money for action should come from the rich part of the world. Many communities struggle with basic needs like access to water and sanitation and do not have resources to think about future risks.