ASIA LOOKS TO TAKE A LEADING ROLE IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

(Shanghai/New York, 12 October 2011): Asia and the Pacific’s most experienced emergency responders have gathered in Shanghai, China to look at strengthening disaster response and preparedness.

Up to 100 disaster management professionals from 25 countries in Asia and the Pacific as well as representatives from the United Nations, the Federation of Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies and international NGOs are participating in the region’s fourth Regional Humanitarian Partnership Meeting.

“Today’s meeting offers a real opportunity to exchange ideas, compare best practices, and discuss how to address the challenges which lie ahead.

“And it will provide new ideas for humanitarian workers worldwide – sending a clear message that Asia is taking a leading role in the evolution of the humanitarian system,” said Valerie Amos, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator in the opening address.

Over the next two days participants from their respective countries will discuss their response to emergencies such as the earthquake and tsunami in Japan, droughts and tropical storms in China, floods in India and Pakistan, and floods in Southeast Asia.

Last year alone, disasters in Asia and the Pacific affected more than 201 million people. Of 373 recorded disasters, 22 were in China, 16 were in India and 14 in the Philippines. Eighty-nine per cent of all people affected by emergencies last year lived in Asia.

“There may not be much we can do to stop many of these events taking place. But, by working together, we can do more to prepare for them ahead of time, to reduce the human cost when they do happen, and to rebuild lives in their aftermath,” said Ms Amos.

“China, and governments throughout the Asia Pacific region, are taking the central role in disaster response, both at home and in the region as a whole. National and local authorities, and the people themselves, form the first line of response in any crisis. Where they are unable to cope, neighbouring countries and regional organizations are also increasingly ready to assist, forming the second line of response.

“In this system, we, the UN, the international community, form a third tier of response – ready to assist national and regional efforts when asked.”

The Shanghai meeting will conclude on the 13 October.

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