



Press Release

United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination team for Disaster Preparedness Assessment concludes its mission in Palestine

Thursday, 3 April 2014

At the request of the State of Palestine and the UN Humanitarian and Resident Coordinator, a United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team for Disaster Preparedness Assessment has just concluded its mission in Palestine to review the national disaster management system. The mission reviewed existing national and local coordination structures, legal frameworks, and capacities for disaster preparedness, response and recovery. The UNDAC mission met with relevant authorities within the Government of Palestine, including the President's Office, the Ministry of Planning and Administrative Development, and key line Ministries, as well as with Palestinian Civil Defense and the Palestinian Red Crescent Society. It also met with international humanitarian and development agencies working on disaster preparedness. The mission included visits to Nablus, Jericho, Hebron, Ramallah and Gaza to review capacities to manage disasters and respond to emergencies and identify areas requiring strengthening.

Despite the vulnerabilities of the Palestinian communities and political complexities, the field visits revealed their resilience to cope with shocks and emergencies, especially in the Gaza Strip. The UNDAC mission actively consulted with civil society organizations, including the Al-Najjah University, refugee camps, UN agencies, other national and international partners active in this field. The mission was supported in country by UNDP and OCHA. *“Considering the constraints and difficulties under which Palestinians live in the West Bank and Gaza, I am impressed with the level of resilience and ability to recover of the Palestinian communities,* said Terje Skavdal, the UNDAC team leader of a 10 member expert mission.

There is an increased frequency of disasters with potential devastating impact on both rich and poor countries. Smaller scale disasters, which are often cyclical and include droughts, floods and extreme temperature, are also on the rise. These often cause more cumulative death and destruction than larger disasters, but draw less attention and fewer resources. This is exemplified in Palestine which experienced two winter storms in 2013 (January and December) that severely affected communities and put to a test the Disaster Management system. The Palestinian authorities, including Civil Defense and other Palestinian ministries, together with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society, were able to mount an impressive initial response to the affected communities, despite limited resources.

However, there were a number of important gaps that the UNDAC mission identified, These include: the absence of a national disaster risk reduction strategy and plan; the weakness of the existing legal framework; the need to mainstream risk management in national development

planning; the importance of strengthening institutional coordination mechanisms and to include relevant international agencies in these coordination mechanisms; the need to develop robust contingency plans; and the importance of including local government in planning and implementing relevant policies and actions. *“The determination of the national Palestinian authorities at the national and local level to carry forward the disaster risk reduction agenda is encouraging”* the Humanitarian and Resident Coordinator, James W. Rawley, added. *“the UN is committed to support Palestine in strengthening resilience and reducing risks.”*