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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR DISASTER REDUCTION

**8 October 2003**

The theme of this year's International Day for Disaster Reduction is "turning the tide on disasters towards sustainable development".

This theme reminds us, during the International Year of Freshwater, that the task is not just to preserve water resources to sustain life, but also to reduce the capacity of water to take life away. More than 90 per cent of all disasters occurring around the world today are related to water – either too little of it, in the case of droughts, or too much of it, in the case of floods, landslides, cyclones, hurricanes and typhoons. Many communities suffer repeated disasters year after year.

Natural hazards are a part of life. But hazards only become disasters when people's lives and livelihoods are swept away. The vulnerability of communities is growing due to human activities that lead to increased poverty, greater urban density, environmental degradation and climate change.

It is well within our power to do something about this. Better decision-making, improved planning, effective risk management, innovation in development and environmental protection activities – these are the human activities that can reduce the vulnerability of communities. To this end, risk assessment and disaster reduction should be integral parts of all sustainable development projects and policies.

On the International Day for Disaster Reduction, let us remind ourselves that we can and must reduce the number and impact of disasters by building sustainable communities that have the long-term capacity to live with risk.