

MEDIA RELEASE

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World Disasters Report – 100 million affected last year

Almost 100 million people were affected by disasters in 2013 a new report shows, and nearly 90 percent of them live in the Asia-Pacific region.

The report focuses on the strong link between culture, attitudes and beliefs and how these impact on a community's ability to be well prepared when disaster strikes.

The World Disasters Report is produced each year by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and includes a summary of disaster data and other information.

"This year's report reveals that the deadliest natural disasters to hit the world last year took place in Asia. Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines claimed nearly 8000 lives, while monsoon floods in India killed 6,000 people, nearly half of all disaster deaths worldwide," said Australian Red Cross Head of International Program, Peter Walton.

"Despite the tragic death and destruction caused by disasters last year, it is heartening that 2013 resulted in the lowest number of people affected in the past 10 years," Mr Walton said.

This year, the World Disasters Report shines a spotlight on culture and risk. It finds that governments and agencies around the world need to make sure culture and beliefs are taken into account to best reduce risk and ultimately save lives before, during and after disasters.

"There is a strong link between culture and reducing risks around disasters. Whether it's preparing for floods, destructive storms or the Ebola crisis, recognising culture can play a big role in saving lives.

"In Sierra Leone, a religious figure recently convinced a million people to get up in the middle of the night and wash with salt water while reading from the Bible, to protect themselves from Ebola.

"Salt water does not protect people from Ebola. Whilst soapy water and weak chlorine solution can kill the Ebola Virus, incidents like these show that agencies need to work effectively with a broad range of community leaders to minimise risks and dangers to the public in emergencies.

"The report highlights that nearly 10 years after the dreadful Asian Tsunami, many people in Aceh, Indonesia believe the disaster was a form of divine punishment for allowing tourism or drilling for oil.

"An increasing amount of our focus these days is on helping communities better prepare for disasters. All our research and experience shows us that people respond to disasters much better, and recover more quickly afterwards, if they are well-prepared. This report reminds us that effective preparation is only possible when we really understand the culture and beliefs of the people involved," said Mr Walton.

100
years

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There are huge financial implications as well. Red Cross data shows that for every dollar spent on reducing risks and preparing for disasters, nearly A\$18 is saved in overall costs.

In 2013, around the world disasters caused economic losses estimated at A\$137 billion dollars. The costliest disasters were a flood in Germany with losses estimated at almost A\$15 billion dollars and Philippines Typhoon Haiyan with losses of A\$11.5 billion dollars.

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World Disasters Report 2013 in numbers

- 77,720 people were affected by disasters in Australia and Pacific in 2013, according to the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) - the source for data in the World Disasters Report.
- In 2013, disasters cost at least A\$3.8 billion in Australia and the Pacific. The costliest disasters in Australia and the Pacific were damage caused in Queensland by ex-Cyclone Oswald and two major fires in NSW and Tasmania. Disasters in Australia during 2013 cost more than A\$2.7 billion.
- A total of 529 disasters were reported worldwide in 2013. There were 337 natural disasters and 192 disasters caused by technology and people.
- Almost 100 million people were estimated to have been affected by disasters in 2013, well below the high levels of 2007 (214.3 million) to 2011, (261.9 million).
- The number of disasters and people affected in 2013 are the lowest of the decade. The highest number of disasters in the last decade occurred in 2005, when a total of 810 disasters were reported.
- Floods remain the most frequent natural disaster, followed by storms. In 2013, floods accounted for 44 per cent of deaths caused by natural hazards, and storms 41 per cent.
- The most severe floods and storms were caused by Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, which affected 16 million people, and Cyclone Phailin in India with 13 million affected.
- A total of 6,711 were reported killed in disasters caused by technology and people around the world, which is 26 per cent below the decade's average. The 'technological disaster' that resulted in the highest number of deaths was the collapse of a textile factory building in Bangladesh which killed 1,127 people.
- In the past 10 years, Asia and the Pacific, including Australia, accounted for over 65 per cent of the total deaths from disasters.

Disaster costs

- In the last 20 years, disasters have been devastating around the world: 4.4 billion people have been affected, 1.3 million people killed and there were over A\$2.16 trillion dollars in economic losses.
- By 2030, the annual cost of disasters is predicted to be A\$478 billion dollars: an estimated increase of 300 per cent in less than two decades.

Reducing risk and disasters

- In 2013, Red Cross and Red Crescent helped more than 25.6 million people living in disaster-prone areas in 121 countries to reduce risk of death or injury by preparing for disasters.
- Red Cross data shows that for every dollar spent on reducing risks and preparing for disasters, an estimated A\$17.84 was saved on average.
- Over the 20 years to 2013, only one out every 10 dollars was spent on reducing risks and preparing for disasters to save lives, prevent injury and protect property.