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International Disaster Reduction Conference (IDRC)

Education and Disaster Reduction

Davos, Switzerland – *International disaster relief donors should focus their funding efforts on preventive measures than reacting to catastrophes like the Bam earthquake, insists an Iranian panelist at the International Disaster Reduction Conference (IDRC).*

The Tehran-based scientist, Prof. Mohsen Ghafory-Ashtiany, offered his advice to nearly 1,000 global exports meeting at a week-long strategy session in this Swiss alpine resort. He works with the International Institute of Earthquake Engineering and Seismology.

According to Ghaforya-Ashtiany, donors worldwide committed $1 billion (US) to the 2003 Bam earthquake relief fund, but less than $100 million ever materialized. He figures the cost of rebuilding the historic Iranian city at $2 to $3 billion. “Usually donors ask ‘What can I do?’” Ghaforya-Ashtiany explained. “We suggest school-safety and other awareness programs. But they say ‘It’s only available for relief’ afterwards’. It does show solidarity, but otherwise it’s not really very helpful. They make a lot of promises, and that raises expectations. Yet what does that help if the funds don’t materialize?”

The panelist’s comments came in a press briefing after sessions on education’s role in preparing societies for disasters like Bam as well as Red Cross/Red Crescent relief efforts to mitigate disasters worldwide.

Despite the toll taken by earthquakes and other natural hazards, a Turkish member of the Red Cross/Red Crescent panel, Hassan Gogus, reported an encouraging sign: Since experiencing a devastating earthquake along the North Anatolian Fault in late 1999, Turkey has become a donor nation, aiding other countries facing similar disasters.

An disaster education panelist, American seismologist Walter Hayes of GADR, pointed out that the poor Western African nation of Burkina Faso has also joined the donors. “They know the scars,” he told a press briefing, referring to Turkey and Burkina Faso. “It breaks down barriers. They have been part of the global alliance. They’ve benefited from aid, and they’re part of the family.”

Four organizing partners are cosponsoring the IDRC: the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN/ISDR), the Global Alliance for Disaster Reduction (GADR) and the Global Disaster Information Network (GDIN).

Lyn Shepard, Conference Journalist

Information:
Ms. Birgit Ottmer, Media Relations Manager, ottmer@slf.ch, +41 79 763 91 88 (mobile), +41 81 417 02 86 (office).