



UNITED NATIONS

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Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

ENVIRONMENTAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE
REQUIRES INTERNATIONAL EFFORT

Rosersberg, Sweden - June 15, 2007 – A stronger global regime is required to meet the challenge of environmental emergencies, especially given additional pressure from climate change and climate-related natural disasters, the Advisory Group on Environmental Emergencies (AGEE) concluded today at its biennial meeting in Stockholm, Sweden.

The AGEE is a unique international forum that brings together environmental experts and disaster managers from around the world to share information, experiences and lessons learned to improve prevention, preparedness and response to environmental emergencies.

A strengthened global regime would have several key elements. Vulnerable nations should take steps to ensure their domestic capacity is sufficient to respond to and recover from environmental emergencies. They should be also enabled to quickly seek and obtain international support to cope with emergencies, as well as to help improve national capacity where needed. Countries able to assist with capacity-building and response missions by providing expertise, specialized equipment and financial resources are encouraged to be ready and willing to provide bilateral assistance and participate in multilateral missions.

“International assistance can make a significant difference in responding to, preparing for and preventing environmental emergencies. If we are going to see more disasters with climate change, all countries must be ready to participate in the international effort to cope with the environmental emergencies that follow many disasters,” said Chris Dijkens, Crisis Head of Department for Crisis Management, Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment of the Netherlands and Chair of this year’s meeting.

The two-day meeting focused on the future of environmental emergency response. New tools were presented at the meeting to assist missions with identifying environmental impacts that pose acute and life-threatening risks to a local population and aid workers, another tool is an online system to access help from specialists in the Netherlands, and a methodology to assess the current capacity of countries seeking to improve their abilities to respond to environmental emergencies.

For further information, please call: Stephanie Bunker, OCHA-New York, +1 917 367 5126, mobile +1 917 892 1679; Kristen Knutson, OCHA-New York, +1 917 367 9262; Elisabeth Byrs, OCHA-Geneva, +41 22 917 2653, mobile, +41 79 473 4570. Roy Brooke, Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit, +41 794445046. OCHA press releases are available at <http://ochaonline.un.org> or www.reliefweb.int.

In his address to the meeting, Tom Hedlund, Principle Secretary of the Swedish Commission on Climate and Vulnerability, said “the climate is warming. Climate change is unequivocal. We must now begin to better define the impacts and their implications. We must also begin developing adaptation measures, including how we are going to respond prepare for and prevent environmental emergencies.”

The AGEE also reviewed and endorsed the future work of the Joint UNEP/OCHA Environment Unit, the principal United Nations mechanism to mobilize and coordinate international assistance to environmental emergencies, and the APELL Programme of UNEP, which raises awareness of disasters at local level and help national authorities to be better prepared to respond to emergencies.

This year’s meeting undertook a number of measures aimed at environmental sustainability, including steps to reduce and offset carbon emissions and reduce the amount of paper used for the meeting.

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