



UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSITY

UNU-EHS

Institute for Environment
and Human Security

Brussels - Environmental degradation is a significant factor that reduces the adaptive capacity of societies to deal with disaster risk in many countries around the globe. The balance sheet for the ten years from 2002 to 2011 is alarming: 4,130 disasters, over one million dead and economic losses of at least 1.195 trillion US dollars. This is demonstrated by the 2nd edition of the WorldRiskReport launched in Brussels today.

The report is presented by the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security ([UNU-EHS](#)), Alliance Development Works/Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft and The Nature Conservancy (TNC). The Alliance is the publisher of the report.

The centerpiece of the report, the WorldRiskIndex, developed by UNU-EHS in Bonn in cooperation with the Alliance, determines the risk of becoming the victim of a disaster as a result of natural hazards for 173 countries throughout the world. According to the presently available data, the Pacific Island state of Vanuatu has the highest disaster risk, at 36.31 per cent. Malta and Qatar, at 0.61 and 0.10 per cent respectively, face the lowest risk worldwide. At 3.48 per cent Belgium ranks 142th and is therefore in the lowest of the five risk categories. Additionally, the 2012 report highlights the aspect of environmental degradation and disasters.

The risk calculated by the index is determined by the extent to which communities are exposed to natural hazards such as droughts, storms or earthquakes, but also by their degree of vulnerability. The latter is dependent on social factors such as the public infrastructure, medical services, the prevailing nutritional situation, governance, the level of education, the availability of insurances that might help to deal with economic losses in an event, as well as the condition of the environment.

"The WorldRiskIndex reveals global hotspots for disaster risk in Oceania, Southeast Asia, the southern Sahel and especially in Central America and the Caribbean. In these places a very high threat of natural disasters and climate change meets very vulnerable communities," explained Prof. Dr. Jakob Rhyner, UNU-EHS Director.

"An example of one such risk hotspot is Haiti. In New Zealand and Haiti earthquakes of similar severity occurred shortly after each other. Whilst New Zealand had a death toll of 187, the earthquake in Haiti cost the lives of over 220,000 people. Additionally, Haiti is characterized by a high level of environmental degradation – it is placed on rank 4 worldwide regarding environmental degradation (New Zealand is placed on rank 142)", added PD Dr. Jörn Birkmann, Scientific Head of the WorldRiskIndex project at the UN University in Bonn. "Especially, deforestation and insufficient land management are increasing the risks with regard to landslides and flooding", he underscored.

"The new WorldRiskReport gives us a vivid picture of how environmental destruction on a global scale is increasingly becoming a direct threat to human beings as well. Where slopes have been deforested, where protective reefs, mangroves and wetlands have degenerated or even completely disappeared, the forces of nature impact with far higher force on inhabited areas," stated Peter Mucke, Director of Alliance Development Works on the occasion of the launch.

Further information:

The WorldRiskReport 2012 can be [downloaded here](#)

A [fact sheet](#) provides answers to frequently asked questions

[Maps and figures](#) from the WorldRiskReport 2012 will be available as high resolution JPG files

Press contact:

Dr. Alice Fišer, fiser@vie.unu.edu , + 49-228-815-0285