The Czech Republic and UNEP to build capacity in disaster risk reduction in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Geneva, 3 November 2014 – Frequent floods in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and especially those that struck earlier this year, prove that there is indeed a window of opportunity for addressing disaster risk, for example, by improving data accuracy and the capacity of expert government agencies in rapid assessment and response. The Czech Republic and UNEP will focus on overcoming the identified gaps in data collection and communication of natural disasters risks in the hydrology sector.

The floods that struck Bosnia and Herzegovina in May 2014 affected a quarter of its territory and approximately one million people, representing some 27% of the country’s population. The resulting damages are estimated at $1.67 billion while the economic losses exceed $1.04 billion. A lack of prevention mechanisms and also of preparedness to safeguard livelihoods, environment and economic activity led to the extreme devastation. More than 70,000 hectares of arable and cultivated land were affected, with 25,000 households suffering substantial reductions in income. But even without the 2014 “superfloods”, Bosnia and Herzegovina has been experiencing more flooding almost every year.

Ongoing recovery efforts of the UN in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been recognized by the government of the Czech Republic. In the aftermath of the floods, and as part of the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment, specific shortcomings were identified in data accuracy and rapid response capacity. The Czech Government’s kind contribution of $50,000 will be channeled through UNEP and aimed at overcoming the identified gaps in data collection and communication of natural disasters risks in the two hydro-meteorological institutes in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This communications and data collection focus represent a new component to the recently approved project “Capacity development for the integration of global environmental commitments into national policies and development decision making”.

This 3-year project, financed by the Global Environment Facility and implemented by UNEP, starts in November 2014 to improve and facilitate the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements in the country and to enhance networking and accessibility of environmental data among national institutions. The project also envisions the improvement of the national air quality monitoring network, working closely with the Federal Hydro-meteorological Institute and the Hydro-meteorological Institute of Republika Srpska. Enhancing the project and future collaboration are seen as key ways to avert from future flood risk and the economic and environmental losses that result.

The UN is working as the lead agency delivering the international community’s flood recovery support to Bosnia and Herzegovina. As the voice of the environment in the UN system, UNEP has a track record working with national authorities to improve environmental
governance and build capacity for environmental management. Having UNEP in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a project office in Sarajevo, is a valuable part of the efforts by UNEP’s Regional Office for Europe to support South-eastern Europe on European integration and mainstreaming the environment into a broader political agenda.

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