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United Nations and a Global Network of Universities Offer Free Online Course on Disasters and Climate Change

Cologne, 1 December 2014 – The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) collaborates with the Cologne University of Applied Sciences (CUAS), the Center for Natural Resources and Development, and the Global Universities Partnership on Environment for Sustainability (GUPES) to offer an online course on “Disasters and Ecosystems: Resilience in a Changing Climate”. The course will be globally launched on 12 January 2015 on the Germany-based online learning platform, iversity.org.

Climate change and the occurrence of natural disasters, as well as strategies to prevent them and mitigate their consequences are well-researched topics. In the digital age, knowledge about them can be spread internationally to a multitude of interested parties. The online course “Disasters and Ecosystems” covers a broad range of interdependent topics such as climate change, disaster risk reduction, ecosystem restoration and community resilience. The core assumption of this course is: Well-managed ecosystems can be a bulwark against natural disasters and climate change impacts.

The online course will be launched in the format of a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), is free of charge for all participants and available to people from any educational background with access to the internet. Universities from all over the world will use the materials for blended learning formats that comprise of both online and offline elements.

The target audience is massive and diverse: Practitioners and students from the field of disaster management, climate change adaptation professionals, development planners and project implementers, as well as committed citizens. Participants who successfully complete the course will be provided with a free certificate.

Instructors include international faculty members from Germany, Egypt, Switzerland, and Austria, supported by a line-up of expert guest lecturers and exclusive interviews with world leaders in the field of climate change, disaster risk reduction and environment:

- Achim Steiner, Executive Director of UNEP
- Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for Disaster Risk Reduction
- Rajendra Pachauri, Chancellor, Teri University
- Julia Marton-Lefèvre, Director General of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (2007-2015)

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Participants can follow the “Disasters and Ecosystems” MOOC according to two options: The “Leadership Track” comprises of six units, providing general introduction to the topics. It is suitable for people from all backgrounds who wish to have a good overview of the subject matter. In the “Expert Track”, 15 units offer more in-depth training on the various tools of ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. In both tracks, participants get the opportunity to network with fellow students from various parts of the world. In addition to the student network, students will be linked to an existing network of practitioners on ecosystem-based disaster risk reduction and adaptation, known as the Partnership for Environment and Disaster Risk Reduction (PEDRR) (www.pedrr.org).

The course was jointly developed by UNEP and CUAS and is supported by a network of international experts and universities through the Center for Natural Resources and Development (CNRD) based at CUAS. “UNEP is very happy to launch this course online as we have been getting an increasing number of requests from around the world, especially our GUPES members”, says Mahesh Pradhan coordinating the online course at the UN Environment Programme. “By launching this MOOC, we are offering state of the art knowledge on Disasters and Climate Change not only for free, but also across age and national boundaries.”

CUAS president Christoph Seeßelberg comments: “We are proud to be part of this initiative to help building skills on the crucially important topic of climate change and have a direct impact on people in the world’s most endangered habitats.”

People interested in enrolling to this course should visit the dedicated page at the iversity website: <https://iversity.org/en/courses/disasters-and-ecosystems-resilience-in-a-changing-climate>

About the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), established in 1972, is the voice for the environment within the United Nations system. Its headquarters are in Nairobi, Kenya. UNEP acts as a catalyst, advocate, educator and facilitator to promote the wise use and sustainable development of the global environment.

About the University of Applied Science Cologne (CUAS)

The Cologne University of Applied Sciences is the largest of its kind in Germany. 23,000 students are taught by approximately 420 professors in 80 courses. Approximately half each in engineering sciences or humanities and social sciences and also applied natural sciences. The Cologne University of Applied Sciences is a full member of the European University Association (EUA). The Institute of Technology and Resources Management in the Tropics and Subtropics (ITT) at CUAS provides innovative education and research regarding the management of water, energy and other renewable natural resources. It aims to enable people from a variety of technical and cultural backgrounds to better solve the problems arising from complex environmental issues.

About CNRD

CNRD-exceed (Center for Natural Resources and Development) is one of five projects under the program “Higher Education Excellence in Development Cooperation – exceed”. It is a knowledge hub and network regarding issues on assessing and managing the natural resources base as prerequisite for sustainable development. It addresses issues of the Post 2015 Agenda in research, higher education and capacity development. While the coordinating office is located at the Institute for Technology and Resources Management in the Tropics and Subtropics (ITT) at the Cologne University of Applied Sciences, there are major satellites in 12 partner universities worldwide.

• **About iversity**

• iversity.org is an online platform for higher education courses. It enables a global community of learners to take courses from excellent teachers and universities from around the world.

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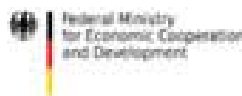
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