PRESS RELEASE

13th June 2011

UK joins the earthquake risk reduction 'task force'

Over half a million people have died in the last decade due to earthquakes, most of these in the developing world where risk is increasing due to rapid population growth and urbanisation. The devastating impact of earthquakes has been at the forefront of news reporting because of this loss of life and economic destruction.

Today the UK's Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) has forged an alliance with the GEM Foundation, the driving force behind the Global Earthquake Model Initiative, in a bid to improve knowledge and reduce the socio-economic risk from such hazards.

The GEM initiative aims to establish uniform, open standards to calculate and communicate earthquake risk worldwide, by developing a global, state-of-the-art and dynamic earthquake risk model. It hopes to minimize loss of life, property damage and social and economic disruption due to earthquakes, by supporting decisions and actions that may lead to better building codes and construction, land use planning for sustainable development, improved emergency response, protection of critical infrastructures and greater access to insurance.

Dr Rui Pinho, GEM Secretary General and Professor John Ludden, BGS Executive Director

Professor John Ludden, Director of NERC's British Geological Survey, will represent the UK on GEM's governing board.

"Recent events around the globe have taught us that there is still much to learn about the earth and the impact its behaviour has on people. Global knowledge sharing and collaboration is therefore of the utmost importance", says Dr Rui Pinho, GEM's Secretary General.

“We need to explore, discuss and test the different approaches used for hazard and risk estimation, we need to build open global databases that account for regional variety, and we need to use the collective wisdom of scientists to greater effect. The United Kingdom was clearly a missing link in this effort, so we are very excited to have NERC and the British Geological Survey closely involved from now on.“

The British Geological Survey already provides rapid access to data on seismic events. Its current focus includes investigating the nature and distribution of earthquake activity and the underlying driving forces, and improving our understanding of seismic hazard both within the UK and internationally.

Professor Alan Thorpe, NERC’s Chief Executive, says, "Recent events in Haiti, New Zealand and Japan have highlighted the importance of earthquake monitoring and study. Improving predictions of earthquake risk is a tremendous scientific challenge, but is vital for minimizing loss of life, property damage and social and economic disruption. Through NERC's participation in the Global Earthquake Model initiative, the UK will strengthen the current international effort being undertaken in this important research area."

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Notes for editors

1. It is GEM’s mission to engage a global community in the design, development and deployment of state-of-the-art models and tools for earthquake risk assessment worldwide. The UK is the ninth country to join this community.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Global Science Forum created the opportunity for an initiative to leverage (scientific) knowledge on earthquake risk for the benefit of society worldwide. What GEM envisions and has started to work on, is the bringing together of state-of-the-art science and national, regional, international organisations as well as individuals, in a global collaborative effort that will have a lasting impact on seismic risk assessment. More information: www.globalquakemodel.org

2. The Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) is the UK's main agency for funding and managing world-class research, training and knowledge exchange in the environmental sciences. It coordinates some of the world's most exciting research projects, tackling major issues such as climate change, environmental influences on human health, the genetic make-up of life on earth, and much more. NERC receives almost £400 million a year from the government's science budget, which it uses to fund independent research and training in universities and its own research centres. More information: www.nerc.ac.uk