Press Release

For more information, please contact:
James Clarke on 0773 369533 or j.clarke@cgiar.org
Samurdhi Ranasinghe 011 288 0000 or s.ranasinghe@cgiar.org

For immediate release

Satellite imaging and disaster management experts gather in Colombo

New space technologies have potential to transform disaster prediction and relief

(Colombo, 19 January 2016). Experts from across Asia gathered to discuss how the next generation of satellite based technologies could help improve disaster preparedness and response at a three-day meeting in Mount Lavinia.

Welcomed by Major General L.B.R. Mark, Director General of the Disaster Management Centre, the delegates will be looking ahead to the next phase of *Sentinel Asia*, a voluntary initiative supporting disaster management in the Asia-Pacific region by using space-based technology, such as satellite earth observation data. The initiative is led by the Asia-Pacific Regional Space Agency Forum (APRSAF).

Mr. S.S. Miyanawala, Secretary, Ministry of Disaster Management addressed the meeting, emphasizing the increasing importance of satellite remote sensing for disaster management and relief.

In addressing the opening session, Dr Peter McCornick, Deputy Director General for IWMI, who co-organized the event with the Disaster Management Center, highlighted the need for such meetings to share knowledge on disaster risk reduction in communities across the region.

Satellites are now capable of identifying objects on the ground as small as 10 meters. They can also use radar and other non-visual sensors, together with high resolution cameras, to measure flood depth and water flow in real time images delivered direct to a desktop computer. This wealth of information will empower both scientists and disaster managers by enabling them to issue earlier warnings of extreme weather events, accurately monitor ground conditions and better target relief efforts.

Key partners in the Mount Lavinia event include the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) and the Colombo-based International Water Management Institute (IWMI).

A good example of how this new technology can assist in disaster management were the recent floods in Southern Sri Lanka. Within in hours of the inundation, IWMI was able to publish a series of maps to help plan relief efforts. The maps were prepared by a consortium

consisting of IWMI, the Disaster Management Centre of the Ministry of Disaster Management (MoDM) and the UN's space based information service for disaster management and emergency response (UN-SPIDER). They showed the flood situation using real-time, cloud-free satellite images provided by the JAXA. The maps were used by the DMC Emergency Operation Centre to support rapid impact assessment and disaster response. The information was also shared with other relevant authorities.

"This partnership has enabled us to deliver accurate and timely maps which we hope can provide valuable information for flood relief," said Giriraj Amaranth who leads IWMI's flood mapping research. "We believe that satellite data has huge potential in this regard and hope that we can play a useful role in rapid emergency response mapping."

Flooding is a recurring problem in Sri Lanka. The rapid response capability through *Sentinel Asia* to provide timely, accurate mapping will hopefully enable future major flooding incidents to be dealt with more effectively.

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Notes for editors:

The **International Water Management Institute (IWMI)** is a non-profit, scientific research organization, headquartered in Colombo, which focuses on the sustainable use of water and land resources in developing countries. IWMI is a member of the CGIAR Consortium. CGIAR is a global partnership that unites organizations engaged in research for a food-secure future. It leads the CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems which examines how we can intensify agriculture while still protecting the environment and lifting millions of farm families out of poverty. www.iwmi.org

The **Disaster Management Centre** was established under the National Council for Disaster Management in accordance with the Sri Lanka Disaster Management Act No. 13 of 2005 passed by the Parliament of Sri Lanka on 13th May 2005. Its vision is: Safer communities and sustainable development in Sri Lanka. Its mission is to create a culture of safety among communities and the nation at large through systematic management of natural, technological and man-made disaster risks. www.dmc.gov.lk

The **Japan Aerospace eXploration Agency or JAXA**, is Japan's national aero-space agency. Through the merger of three previously independent organizations, JAXA was formed on 1 October 2003. JAXA is responsible for research, technology development and the launch of satellites into orbit, and is involved in many more advanced missions, such as asteroid exploration. Its corporate slogan is Explore to Realize. http://global.jaxa.jp

The **Sentinel Asia** initiative was established in 2005, as a collaboration between regional space agencies and disaster management agencies, applying remote sensing and Web-GIS technologies to assist disaster management in the Asia-Pacific region. To date multiple national agencies of about 25 countries in the region have joined and benefited from the disaster support services provided by Sentinel Asia.
https://sentinel.tksc.jaxa.jp/sentinel2/topControl.jsp