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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Earthquakes Are Inevitable, Disasters Don't Have to Be: *How Governments and Communities Can Build Resilience and Reduce the Risk for Disaster***

(DENVER, April 23, 2013) - Many countries in Latin America and around the world are highly susceptible to natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, landslides and flooding. To exacerbate the problem, millions of families in these countries live in sub-standard houses, making them highly vulnerable to natural disasters. According to the Inter-American Development Bank, there are many reasons why homeowners are unable to build safe houses including lack of access to capital, poor-quality materials and the use of unsafe building practices.

This week Build Change Founder and CEO Dr. Elizabeth Hausler Strand is participating in the World Economic Forum on Latin America in Lima, Peru. At the Forum, she will discuss with other world leaders about how governments, businesses and homeowners can work together to build resilience to earthquakes and other natural disasters.

"Earthquakes don't kill people; poorly designed and constructed buildings do," explains Dr. Hausler Strand. "Earthquake disasters are a man-made problem, caused by poverty, lack of building standards and enforcement and lack of access to affordable materials, skills and tools to build safely. Because it is a man-made problem, there is a man-made solution."

Build Change works toward systems change and creating an ecosystem in which disaster-resistant construction becomes the norm. It does this by empowering everyone in the construction-sector supply chain and governments with the skills, tools and incentives to build earthquake-resistant houses. So far, Build Change has trained more than 15,000 people in Indonesia, Haiti and China in safe, earthquake-resistant design and construction (ERDC) techniques, who have in turn built nearly 20,000 safe, earthquake-resistant houses. Build Change has also worked closely with governments, including the Haiti Ministry of Public Works (MTPTC) to develop and produce an official MTPTC guide for the retrofit of small houses and technical resources on confined masonry, reinforced masonry and mixed-use.

To help vulnerable homeowners build or make life-saving improvements to their homes prior to a disaster, Build Change is implementing an innovative, sustainable market-based solution. This includes partnering with housing finance programs to provide technical assistance to homeowners and builders on safe housing upgrading and retrofitting. The long-term impacts will be significant, including saving lives and reducing overall disaster-relief costs and efforts.



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“According to the UNDP, for every dollar spent on disaster preparedness, \$7 is saved in disaster response – not to mention the thousands of lives that are saved,” adds Dr. Hausler Strand. “By implementing a sustainable, preventative approach that enables homeowners to improve the structural integrity of their houses before a natural catastrophe strikes, Build Change can train people to build safe houses, create jobs and save thousands of lives.”

Sogesol, the Haitian microlending subsidiary of Sogebank, is implementing a housing finance and technical assistance project in partnership with Build Change to rebuild and upgrade homes in the earthquake-affected area of greater Port-au-Prince. Early indicators suggest there is a growing market for housing financing with technical assistance in Haiti.

Build Change is seeking partners – governments, public and private entities, donors, NGOs, financial institutions – to implement a similar program in Latin America to build resilience and reduce the risk for disaster before an earthquake strikes. By working together to meet this challenge, governments and communities will significantly build resilience and reduce the risk for disaster.

#### **About Build Change**

Build Change is an international, non-profit social enterprise with a mission to reduce deaths, injuries and economic losses caused by housing collapses due to earthquakes in developing countries. It does this by designing earthquake-resistant houses and training builders, homeowners, engineers and government officials to build them. Because of Build Change’s award-winning design and capacity-building programs in post-earthquake reconstruction programs in Haiti, Indonesia and China, more than 80,000 people are living in safer houses. Visit [www.buildchange.org](http://www.buildchange.org).

#### **About the World Economic Forum**

The World Economic Forum is an independent international organization committed to improving the state of the world by engaging business, political, academic and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas. Incorporated as a not-for-profit foundation in 1971 and headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, the Forum is tied to no political, partisan or national interests. Visit [www.weforum.org](http://www.weforum.org).

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