

Welcome/Opening Remarks
by
Mrs. Chitriya Pinthong
Deputy Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs and
Acting ARF SOM Leader of Thailand
at the Open Session of the
10th ASEAN Regional Forum Inter-Sessional Meeting
on Disaster Relief (ARF ISM on DR)
Ballroom 1, Royal Orchid Sheraton Hotel and Towers
2 September 2010, 09.00-09.45 hrs.

Madam Co-Chair,
Excellencies,
Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, Secretary-General of ASEAN,
Dr. Bichit Ratakul, Director of the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre
(ADPC),
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand, I have the honour and pleasure of extending a warm welcome to all participants to this 10th ASEAN Regional Forum Inter-Sessional Meeting on Disaster Relief (ARF ISM on DR).

This is the second time that Thailand is co-chairing the ARF ISM on DR with the United States, the first time being last September in sunny Honolulu. Now Bangkok may not offer as beautiful beaches as Waikiki but we are confident that the city will be equally hospitable and a good host nevertheless!

Natural disasters will continue to challenge the international community and threaten the countries and peoples in the Asia-Pacific region. Whether caused by natural phenomena or aggravated by climate change and other factors, natural disasters will continue to confront us.

According to the first ***Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction*** launched last year, between 1978 and 2008, the number of people killed by natural disaster events, excluding epidemics, was close to 2.3 million people. Economic losses in the same period were about 1.5 trillion U.S. dollars. The vast majority of deaths and losses occurred in developing countries, much of it the result of some 23 mega disasters.

Unfortunately, the Asia-Pacific region has been one of the most disaster prone regions in the world. We have encountered everything: from the Tsunami and earthquake in 2004 to Cyclone Nargis in 2008 and most recently the flooding in Pakistan. Indeed, we extend our best wishes to the people of Pakistan and hope that international cooperation and assistance will continue to help alleviate the plight of those who have suffered and are still suffering from this disaster.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This trend of disasters in the region has led to greater efforts from within the region to enhance its preparedness to meet the threat posed by natural disasters.

ASEAN has made great strides forward in strengthening cooperation and preparedness and we are fortunate and honoured that the Secretary-General of ASEAN has kindly agreed to be with us today and share his thoughts with us on this issue and others.

The ARF has also made much progress, developing many useful tools and ideas on how to enhance disaster management capacities. But more remains to be done and hence the call of the Foreign Minister of Thailand at the 17th ARF this past July for the ARF to continue to reinforce its capabilities to deal with natural disasters.

Even the East Asia Summit (EAS) and potentially the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) Plus have roles to play in disaster management cooperation.

This regional cooperation needs to be rationalized across the various bodies and arrangements. It also needs to reinforce ongoing efforts at the multilateral level where the United Nations and its agencies play a key role. Indeed, the regional-multilateral partnership is fast becoming the norm in multi-party cooperation to address global issues, and there is no better example of this in our region than the successful ASEAN-UN partnership in dealing with Cyclone Nargis.

But at the end of the day, the primary responsibility will rest with individual countries, as underscored by various UNGA resolutions, working in tandem with regional and multilateral efforts as called for in the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015.

For Thailand, natural disaster management is an important priority involving many agencies, some of whom are present with us today. Just a couple of weeks ago on 20 August, our Prime Minister and others participated in C-MEX 10 or Crisis Management Exercise 10, simulating a national response to a disaster in Trat province. We will continue to pursue efforts at the local, provincial and national level to enhance preparedness for and response to natural disasters.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Noah's Ark was built before the rains came. Preparedness and planning thus continue to be critical factors in disaster risk reduction, whether at the national, regional or global level.

As we continue to work together to keep our peoples and countries safe from the devastation of natural disasters, I am hopeful that this 10th edition of the ARF ISM on DR will continue to contribute concrete ideas that will take forward regional cooperation on disaster management, better preparedness and more effective planning and implementation.

May I wish the Meeting much success in its deliberations.

Thank you.
