

**Remarks for U.S. Delegation Lead
ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Disaster Relief
Bangkok, Thailand
September 2, 2010**

I would like to thank our Thai hosts, and especially Deputy Permanent Secretary Chitriya Pinthong and Director-General Itti Ditbanjong, for their gracious hospitality and co-chairing arrangements. It is an honor also to have ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan present here today to deliver the keynote remarks. The support of the Thai government and of the ASEAN Secretariat for this initiative, and the presence of you all here today, highlights the importance of the ASEAN Regional Forum in addressing new security challenges. Disaster relief, in particular, represents one of the more important and expanding areas of nontraditional security cooperation.

As Secretary Clinton stated in Hanoi just over a month ago at the ARF Ministerial, and the President will during his upcoming meeting with ASEAN Leaders, the United States has elevated its engagement with Asia and with ASEAN in particular. The Leaders-level interactions, our planned participation in the East Asia Summit, the establishment of a U.S. Mission to ASEAN, our hosting of APEC in 2011, and Secretary Gates' participation in the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Plus meetings all reflect the very real and heightened level of U.S. engagement with Asia's multilateral institutions. Our efforts in these institutions focus on promoting more extensive and action-oriented agendas, and this is especially true within the ASEAN Regional Forum.

With the ASEAN Regional Forum, disaster relief cooperation has been the most active area for ARF's capacity building and development. Through the 2009 U.S.-Philippines co-chaired Voluntary Demonstration of Response exercise and the intensive planning for the upcoming exercise in Indonesia, we have improved the relationships and response skills of our civilian and military assisting forces. At the same time, the ASEAN Regional Forum has made progress on efforts to streamline relief operations through initiatives such as the ARF Model Arrangement. The ASEAN Regional Forum has provided unique value to the growing architecture disaster relief cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, a topic this ISM will focus on.

Asia, and South and Southeast Asia in particular, is unfortunately prone to major natural disasters, as the headlines this week about the latest volcanic eruption in Indonesia remind us. Our job this week, and through institutions like the ASEAN

Regional Forum, is to ensure that our governments and non-government actors are fully prepared to assist each other when requested and are able to manage effectively the full range of emergencies and disaster relief. The United States remains ready to assist the ASEAN Regional Forum and your governments to develop those national and regional capacities as a partner. I wish you success in laying the foundation for greater regional cooperation in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.