

**Keynote Address of**  
**H.E. Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, Secretary-General of ASEAN**  
**10<sup>th</sup> ARF Inter-Sessional Meeting on Disaster Relief**

Bangkok, 2 September 2010

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*Excellencies, the Co-chairs of the ARF ISM-DR:* the Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kingdom of Thailand, **Khun Chitriya Pinthong**, and **Ms. Judith Cefkin**, Deputy Chief of Mission of the United States; H.E. the Ambassador of Viet Nam as ASEAN Chair; H.E. the Ambassador of Indonesia as Chair of the 18<sup>th</sup> ARF, Director-General **Itti Ditbanjong** of ASEAN-Thailand, **Dr. Bhichit Rattakul**, Executive Director of the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC).

*Ladies and Gentlemen,*

First of all, I thank the Foreign Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand, H.E. Kasit Piromya, for inviting me to deliver the keynote address at this important meeting this morning.

I have been given to understand that it is rather unusual and unprecedented that a SG of ASEAN addresses an intersessional meeting of the ARF. But in my opinion, this is no ordinary ARF meeting. This is a meeting about disaster relief cooperation in the ARF. This is the cooperation area that I am personally very interested in and very keen to do whatever I can – especially in my special capacity as the

***ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance Coordinator*** – to help promote more cooperation. For I believe that the better cooperation we can organize, the more lives we can save in major disasters in our part of the world. And the more efficiency we can develop in our combined efforts, the better and more effective humanitarian assistance we can bring to disaster survivors.

While we are gathering here this morning, tens of thousands of Indonesians have been evacuated to flee the erupting Mount Sinabung volcano in North Sumatra, near Medan. Millions of Pakistanis have been made homeless by floods. The traumatic scars of the 2004 Tsunami and the 2008 Cyclone Nargis are still fresh in our memories. Hence, we can empathize with the USA when Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast, particularly New Orleans, five years ago this week. And now another big one, Hurricane Earl, is churning in the Gulf of Mexico.

Evidently, more and more natural disasters happen in larger and larger scale. Some people blame this phenomenon on the global warming: the world's natural ecosystems have been upset and damaged in recent decades; the severe natural disasters are the inevitable effects when the world loses its balances.

Since it will take decades to try to restore the natural balances, we might as well get ready and prepare for the worst. Hence, it makes sense that we develop more and more regional and international cooperation in disaster relief.

## **AADMER and Nargis**

I am pleased to note that ASEAN has been in the vanguard of promoting regional and international cooperation in disaster relief. Our landmark ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) went into effect last December. Now we in ASEAN are setting up the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistant (AHA) Centre in Jakarta.

Based on the AADMER framework, ASEAN mobilized massive humanitarian assistance to assist the survivors of Cyclone Nargis when the super storm struck Myanmar's Ayeyarwady Delta on 2 and 3 May 2008, killing about 140,000 within just a few hours.

Three days ago, I co-chaired with H.E. Dr. Noeleen Heyzer, the Under Secretary-General of the UN and Executive Secretary of ESCAP, a one-day conference in Bangkok to examine lessons learned from the ASEAN-led post-Nargis humanitarian assistance. We also used the occasion to thank the international community for their generous support for the relief and recovery in Ayeyarwady Delta.

One important lesson from our 26-month of post-Nargis operations is this: there is a need for strong leadership and an effective coordination mechanism to respond more effectively to major disasters. In the case of post-Nargis, we relied on the Tripartite Core Group (consisting of ASEAN, the UN, and the Government of Myanmar).

Another important lesson is the invaluable experience of working with our friends and partners everywhere who have different strength and capability to contribute to disaster relief.

### **ADMM and ADMM Plus**

In recent years, our ASEAN Defence Ministers and their defence officials have been active in engaging civil society organizations and civilian authorities in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR). In Ha Noi on 12 October 2010, our ASEAN Defence Ministers will meet their counterparts from eight Dialogue Partner countries for the first meeting of ADMM Plus.

One of the practical areas that the ASEAN side intends to bring to this new process is HADR. This should not be a surprise. After all, the defence establishments have the necessary equipment (helicopters, transport ship, landing crafts, trucks, etc.,) and the manpower to provide emergency disaster relief and humanitarian assistance.

This ADMM-Plus initiative is a welcome development. And I am looking forward to participating in the discussion in Ha Noi on 12 October 2010.

### **ARF and ADMM-Plus Synergy**

Now one important question that we should ask here in this meeting is how the ARF is going to contribute to the growing regional and international efforts in disaster relief cooperation.

The ARF is run by Foreign Ministers, while the ADMM-Plus will involve Defence Ministers. The Defense Ministers in the ADMM-Plus will come from 10 ASEAN Member States and eight Dialogue Partner countries (Australia, China, India, Japan, the RoK, New Zealand, Russia, and the USA), that are also participating countries of the ARF.

The challenge of creating the synergy between the ARF and the ADMM-Plus is real and urgent.

Nevertheless, I am confident that all parties concerned in ASEAN, the ARF, and the ADMM-Plus can learn from one another, and pull together to create an efficient and highly effective region-wide disaster management arrangement, in which every party concerned can have an important role to play.

This is an endeavour that we cannot fail. The life, the safety, the livelihood, and the well-being, of hundreds of millions people in our part of the world are at stake. They count on our successes to protect and assist them whenever a major disaster strikes.

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