

Remarks by
H.E. Le Luong Minh
Secretary-General of ASEAN
at the Opening Ceremony of the
2013 ASEAN Regional Disaster Emergency Response Simulation Exercise
(ARDEX-13)
21 October 2013, Hanoi, Viet Nam

Excellency Hoang Trung Hai, Deputy Prime Minister and Excellency Cao Duc Phat, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of Viet Nam,
Distinguished delegates and participating teams from ASEAN Member States, ASEAN Dialogue Partners and other partner organisations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

ASEAN's geographical location and climate change have made our region host to numerous natural disasters, including the recent three prominent calamities - the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, the 2008 Cyclone Nargis and the 2011 Thailand Flood. We have also experienced simultaneous disasters in multiple countries almost every year. On average, the ASEAN region suffers natural disaster-related losses amounting up to an estimated US\$ 4.4 billion a year. This does not include the losses resulting from the large-scale disasters I mentioned above. And this is outrageous for a combined population of 600 millions with a combined GDP of only 2 trillion US dollars. The strong earthquake that shook central Philippines last week is yet another manifestation of how prone our region is to natural calamities. Hence, each ASEAN Member State must make sure that when a massive disaster strikes, there is the capacity within the country to respond and when needed, there are effective collective mechanisms in place for regional collaboration. The adoption of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response or AADMER reflects ASEAN's strong commitment to reducing losses resulting from disasters and to enhancing ASEAN's collective response to disasters.

ASEAN can be proud of its creation of the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance Centre or the AHA Centre which demonstrates how ASEAN has turned policy decisions into concrete actions on the ground. Less than two years old, since its establishment in November 2011, the AHA Centre has facilitated ASEAN's response to seven disasters, including the recent earthquake in the Philippines.

ASEAN's achievements under the AADMER have been recognized in the world as a model for other regions to follow. ASEAN's achievements in this area have changed the humanitarian landscape of the region. ASEAN's leading role in facilitating humanitarian response has contributed valuable lessons for the realization of AADMER as the region's own framework for humanitarian assistance.

In 2009, the ASEAN Leaders assigned the Secretary-General of ASEAN as the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance Coordinator for both large-scale natural disasters and pandemics, reaffirming ASEAN's priority for humanitarian assistance. Disaster management and humanitarian assistance continue to be prominent on ASEAN's agenda. Recently, the 23rd ASEAN Summit in Brunei Darussalam adopted the **ASEAN Declaration on Enhancing Cooperation in Disaster Management** further affirming ASEAN 's centrality and leadership in the area of disaster management.

Despite our strong commitment, ASEAN's capacity in responding to disasters continues to be tested. Disasters unfortunately have become permanent features of our region. We have no other choice than getting prepared to respond. Regular simulation exercises like ARDEX is important for us to assess if our disaster response mechanisms are effective and if further improvements need to be made. I hope that ARDEX-13 will generate constructive and practical inputs for the implementation of AADMER and enhance our collective response to disasters in the region.

My gratitude goes to the Government of Viet Nam , this year's Chair of the AADMER Conference of the Parties (COP) and the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM) for leading and the AHA Centre for putting tremendous efforts in co-organizing this event.

To close, may this event continue to inculcate us the importance of working together in reducing disaster losses and enhancing our collective response to disasters in order to achieve sustainable development in the region.

I thank you!
