



Joint Press Release
ASEAN-UN-World Bank Set to Collaborate to Reduce Disaster Risk
Bali, Indonesia, 18 May 2009

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) and the World Bank announced today a cooperation program to strengthen disaster risk reduction and disaster management in Southeast Asia.

This program aims to help ASEAN reduce its vulnerability to natural hazards, thus protecting its citizens from the impact of extreme weather events in the future. The program is the focus of the Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) on Disaster Risk Reduction, a tripartite agreement between the ASEAN Secretariat, the UNISDR and the World Bank.

The program lays a framework for technical support from the UN and the World Bank to help ASEAN formulate and implement strategies and action plans for disaster risk reduction and management. The objectives of this program include (i) building ASEAN's capacity in the areas of disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation; (ii) mobilizing resources for the implementation of disaster risk reduction initiatives in ASEAN; and (iii) helping ASEAN policy-makers gain knowledge of effective and practical ways to reduce disaster risks.

"ASEAN has been addressing disasters, natural or otherwise, as and when it happens. The region where ASEAN is located geographically is one that is prone to disasters. It sits between several tectonic plates causing earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tsunamis. The region is also located in between huge oceans namely the Pacific and the Indian oceans causing seasonal typhoons and in some areas, tsunamis", said Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, the Secretary-General of ASEAN. "With 570 million people in the region, it is time for us to be better prepared for future disasters by empowering ourselves with better techniques and coordinating mechanisms involving the governments and civil societies of ASEAN. Our tripartite program with the UN and the World Bank is innovative as we would capitalize the expertise and strengths of the three organisations to help achieve our common vision of a disaster-resilient and safer community".

Recent natural disasters in Asia – including the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, the Yogyakarta earthquake in 2006 and the cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008 – highlight the region's vulnerability. As more and more ASEAN citizens move into cities in search of better opportunities, they also face greater risks from natural hazards. Most major ASEAN cities are located near rivers or the ocean, which heightens their vulnerability to unusual weather events induced by climate change. In addition, many ASEAN countries have a long history of annual floods, droughts, and cyclones – each of which could cause catastrophic loss of life and property.

Following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, ASEAN countries signed the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response, reaffirming the countries' commitment to reducing disaster losses and improving response to disaster emergencies. It is expected that the agreement will enter into force soon following ratifications by two remaining countries. "When entered into force, the agreement will put in place the coordinating measures and mechanisms required to help ASEAN achieve a disaster-resilient and safer community. Therefore, our tripartite programme with the UN and the World Bank is timely as ASEAN is gearing up to better prepare for future disasters", said Dr. Surin.

"Natural disasters tend to have more profound effects on the lives and livelihoods of the poorest and most

vulnerable people,” said the World Bank Vice President for the East Asia and Pacific Region, James Adams. “As we’re focusing on surviving the global economic downturn, we must not lose sight of that. ASEAN’s experience shows how vulnerable its members are to natural hazards. The impacts of climate change and the effects of rapid urbanization only increase that vulnerability.”

The ASEAN Secretariat-UNISDR-World Bank cooperation program builds on the experience of multi-donor partnership support following the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, the Yogyakarta earthquake of 2006 and Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar of 2008.

Concerted efforts in the aftermath of these events helped the affected countries assess the extent of loss and damage and brought much-needed relief and recovery assistance to the victims. The three partners have now agreed to set up a joint consultative mechanism at the working level to strengthen coordination in disaster relief, culminating in the Memorandum of Cooperation.

“Disaster reduction is a critical challenge for Asia. I have followed closely how several Asian countries have made good progress in building their resilience to natural hazards. Much more needs to be done, and I am confident that Asia has the experience, resources and technical knowledge to achieve fast results”, says Margareta Wahlström, the UN’s Assistant Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction. “We need a radical shift in development practices and planning and, as a priority, merging disaster risk reduction, poverty reduction and climate change adaptation into a single, coherent and innovative approach.”

The DRM Knowledge Notes Series was also launched by the Governor of Bali. The Director of the East Asia Region's Sustainable Development Department, John Roome, presented the Governor with a set of the first notes published in the series. The East Asia Region's Disaster Management Team will publish these knowledge notes on a regular basis.

The joint cooperation program was launched today at the Bali Disaster Risk Reduction Forum, the first tripartite forum and training workshop. The Forum featured sessions on climate change adaptation and strengthening early warning systems as well as risk assessments. With over 100 participants from all ten Member States of ASEAN, UN and other partner agencies, International Financial Institutions and the civil society, the Forum provided a platform for ASEAN policy makers to interact with global and regional experts as well as each other on disaster risk reduction and management.

For more information about ASEAN, visit: www.asean.org

For more information about the United Nations ISDR, visit: www.unisdr.org

For more information about the World Bank, visit: www.worldbank.org

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