

SPEECH BY DSG VONGTHEP ARTHAKAIVALVATEE

at the Red Cross Red Crescent Seminar

on Resilient ASEAN Region

24 April 2018, Singapore

- *Mr. Jagan Chapagain, Under Secretary General for Programmes and Operations of IFRC.*
- *Dr Hugo Slim, Head of Policy and Humanitarian Diplomacy of ICRC.*
- *Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.*

1. It is my great honour and pleasure to attend the seminar on ‘Resilient ASEAN Region’ today in a beautiful and vibrant Singapore. I would like to congratulate the Singapore Red Cross, together with the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and the International Committee of Red Cross, for organizing this important and timely event.
2. Last year during the 31st ASEAN Summit held in Manila in November 2017, the ASEAN Secretary-General’s Statement on the Engagement with Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies was issued, recognizing the vital role of the Movement in alleviating human suffering in the aftermath of natural and man-made disasters and other related challenges in the ASEAN region.

3. This year under Singapore's Chairmanship of ASEAN, the theme of "resilient and innovative" is emphasized. This theme encapsulates the vision for ASEAN as enshrined in the ASCC Blueprint and the ASEAN Vision 2025 on Disaster Management, where ASEAN needs to be united in facing the growing uncertainties in the changing global humanitarian landscape.
4. Against this backdrop, this seminar clearly corresponds to the collective resolve of ASEAN Member States on issues related to crisis and disaster management. It not only provides us with valuable opportunity to share experiences in this field, but also showcases strong partnership between the IFRC, the ICRC and the ASEAN Secretariat in fostering resilience across our region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

5. That ASEAN is a region prone to natural disasters is a foregone conclusion. Over the past 15 years, we have had to deal with the detrimental impact of the Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004, Cyclone Nargis in 2008 and Super Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. These three major disasters combined resulted in more than 278,000 fatalities and total economic losses exceeding US\$ 22.5 billion. These uncompromising catastrophes underscored the need for ASEAN to strengthen its ability to respond to disasters and build back better.
6. In light of this, the ASEAN Leaders signed the *ASEAN Declaration on One ASEAN, One Response: ASEAN Responding to Disasters as One in the Region and Outside the Region* at the 28th ASEAN Summit in Vientiane in

September 2016. At the heart of this Declaration lies a responsibility for us to synergise our efforts in building an ASEAN Community that is safe and resilient.

7. Promoting resilience through a people-centred and people-oriented ASEAN Community is on the top list of our agenda. But to do so most effectively would require it to be ingrained as a culture – or for that matter, a socio-cultural DNA of our citizens. Here, I am pleased to report to all of you that ASEAN has embarked on a new dimension in building its Culture of Resilience through the “*ASEAN Declaration on Culture of Prevention for a Peaceful, Inclusive, Resilient, Healthy and Harmonious Society*” which was adopted at the 31st ASEAN Summit in November last year.
8. The Culture of Prevention represents a paradigm shift in our thinking and mind-set, especially in enabling ASEAN to comprehensively respond to challenges that hamper sustainable development in our region. It seeks to address underlying root causes of social issues, including but not limited to poverty, inequality, disparity, youth unemployment and disenfranchisement, marginalization, social exclusion, racial and religious discrimination, social injustice, access to education, healthcare and quality of environment.
9. One of the six thrusts of the Culture of Prevention Declaration is “Promoting a culture of resilience and care for the environment”. This clearly shows ASEAN’s commitment to strengthen resiliency of its people through promoting environmental awareness and preparing people for emergencies

as a means to prevent and mitigate risks of natural, human-induced disasters and environmental degradation.

10. While recognizing the growing occurrences of natural disasters, ASEAN continues to encounter complex emergencies and an increasing threat of human-induced disasters. The two operations of the AHA Centre in 2017 to deliver relief items to displaced communities in Marawi City, the Philippines, and to support the Myanmar Government in addressing the humanitarian situation in Rakhine State, reinforced this stark reality.

11. Going forward ASEAN will be expected to play more visible role in this regard. This is why I would like to report that we held a workshop in Jakarta last month to review the implementation of the One ASEAN One Response Declaration, including recalibrating the definition of human-induced disasters. This is where the Culture of Prevention can be useful in fortifying efforts of ASEAN in forging preventive measures to address these challenges. These include, for example, the ASEAN Safe School Initiative and disaster risk transfer financial mechanism, to name a few.

12. Fostering the culture of prevention in order to build a resilient ASEAN Community will surely require strong support, partnership and collaboration from different actors who share a common goal with the ASEAN Vision 2025, the AADMER Work Programme and the One ASEAN One Response Declaration, not only at the regional but also at the national and local level, and to me most importantly – at the heart of the ASEAN people.

13. As we are building the ASEAN Community, the people of ASEAN must be put first at the center of everything, and must be kept aware and updated of what resilient ASEAN is all about, what are the goals and activities that have been contributed toward achieve it. And we believe that, with the support from the National Societies of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and other partners, ASEAN would be able to realize its vision towards resilient ASEAN by 2025.

14. In this momentous occasion, I also would like to highlight several key activities to showcase a firm partnership between ASEAN and IFRC under the prevention and mitigation focus, namely: i). the Joint Study on Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) in Disasters in ASEAN; ii) Development of the ASEAN Disaster Law Mapping Report and Peer Learning online platform and the iii). Peer Exchange Visit to ASEAN Secretariat. These flagship activities accentuated a strong bond between ASEAN and IFRC in community-building activities and set a common ground between IFRC's humanitarian principles and ASCC's Culture of Prevention.

15. The ASEAN Secretary-General's Statement highlights ASEAN's commitment to pursue a constructive cooperation with the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement. Leveraging on the IFRC's experience on the One Billion Coalition Project, we are keen to see through the launch of ASEAN Coalition for Resilience soon. It is our hope that such coalition, particularly through the active network of National Societies, will cover different stages,

including resource mobilization, enhancing dialogue, capacity-building and expanding networks at the grass root level across the region.

For me personally, the work of such coalition should not only be limited to crisis and disaster management, but should also lend itself to strategic communications and localization of ASEAN messages and narratives – a key to success of ASEAN community building effort.

16.I am going to close my speech with a *call for action*. I call on various stakeholders in ASEAN Member States as well as our partners to support and invest in programmes on building disaster resilient communities. I also call on all of us to help inject “innovation in our resilience initiatives for the region”. Building a resilient ASEAN is a daunting challenge, but with your help and collaboration, I believe that we can work together, hand-in-hand so as to add positive values to benefit our people.

17.So allow me to end my speech with a quote from Confucius:

"When it is obvious that the goals cannot be reached, don't adjust the goals, adjust the action steps."

Thank you.