

**OPENING REMARKS BY BENJAMIN WILLIAM, SECRETARY GENERAL,
SINGAPORE RED CROSS AT THE “A RESILIENT SOUTHEAST ASIA - A
RED CROSS RED CRESCENT SEMINAR - 24 APRIL 2018”**

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Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning and welcome to this Red Cross Red Crescent Seminar - “A Resilient Southeast Asia”. Many of you have come from overseas, including our distinguished colleagues from the sister National Societies in Southeast Asia, ICRC and IFRC, to join us for this seminar and I extend to all of you a warm welcome to all of you. We have a list of very distinguished and knowledgeable speakers and panelists today.

We have a very interesting agenda ahead of us this morning and I will not take too long with my welcome remarks. This seminar is jointly organised by the IFRC and ICRC, in collaboration with Singapore Red Cross. I believe the question in the minds of many of you is, “Why this seminar?” ; “why the theme of resilience?”

There are several reasons for this.

This year Singapore is the Chairman of ASEAN, and in fact the first ASEAN Summit for the year, will commence tomorrow. As its theme for the year, ASEAN and Singapore has chosen the theme of Resilience. And it is understandable why resilience

is so critical for ASEAN countries. **Resilience** the ability of an individual or community to manage and deal with present vulnerabilities, and be able to manage and recover from future shocks or disturbances.

The Asia Pacific, and in particular the ASEAN region is amongst the most prone to disasters. The impact of climate change and global warming means that not only will we continue to be prone to disasters, it is becoming evident that they will be more frequent, more intense and more unpredictable. On top of this we face man-made and demographic challenges like movement of displaced persons and the aging population. ASEAN has no choice but to take the building of resilience and resilient communities very seriously. As the auxiliary to the government, The Red Cross Red Crescent Societies of SEA, want to work with the government and the private sector on this urgent and critical task of building resilience.

Secondly, there is a clear recognition, given the enormity of the challenges, that no one body, whether governments or large humanitarian organisations can undertake this task of building resilience on their own. In December 2015, the IFRC launched the One Billion Coalition. This initiative was launched as a call and commitment to enable by 2025 one billion people to become more resilient in the face of shocks and adversity. It also aimed to encourage collaboration and partnership platforms bringing together the public and private partners, academics, local actors and people themselves to step up the efforts to build resilient communities. A seminar like this bringing together government actors, private sector, academics and others, is indeed a platform to inform and motivate each other on how we can build these coalition. And more importantly this seminar is not an event, but marks the start of a journey.

Third we, the RCRC Movement in the region, are on the verge of concluding an MoU with the ASEAN Secretariat. The MOU provides a framework for collaboration that envisions the launch of the 'ASEAN Coalition for Resilience' with a view to advancing the commitment to foster a people-oriented ASEAN Community - indeed a people-oriented **RESILIENT** ASEAN Community. The ASEAN partnership will focus three

shared resilience-based priorities: Disaster risk management, Healthcare and Youth. Additionally, both organisations are contemplating the overall target of mobilising over 100 million people. This seminar is a first step towards us building this ASEAN coalition for resilience.

The RCRC Movement have already engaged 5.5 million people through disaster risk reduction programmes, we have trained 1.4 million people in first aid in Southeast Asia and the numbers grow daily. Leveraging on our partnerships, the SEA National Societies' contribution to resilience has already been significant and far reaching. However there is no room for complacency or even satisfaction. There are still millions of challenged individuals, thousands of vulnerable villages and communities, that need to be reached with support to be made less vulnerable.

I was asked at an media interview on CNA yesterday how fast did the RCRC wanted to be able to respond after a disaster. My answer was, no matter how fast we responded after a disaster or a crisis, it was not fast enough. The aim of the Red Cross Red Crescent was to be able to respond before the disaster or crisis even struck. With our network of volunteers from the cities to the villages, kampongs, barangays, our aim was to build resilient, ready and committed individuals and communities, who would be more prepared to face any disaster and crisis, to minimize the negative impact of such disasters, and most importantly be able to manage and recover from any shocks and loss they may suffer, at times with help from others.

This then provides the context of why we have put together this seminar - to pique the interest and curiosity of all of you of how you can be a part of this noble endeavour to build a powerful ASEAN coalition of all sectors - private and government, humanitarian and commercial, academic and media, to build a Resilient ASEAN Community.

Thank you.