

OPENING REMARKS OF SG DATO LIM JOCK HOI

THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE ASEAN HIGH-LEVEL SYMPOSIUM ON DISASTER MANAGEMENT

26 February 2020

ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, Indonesia

- *His Excellency Ambassador Deng Xijun, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China to ASEAN,*
- *His Excellency, Under-Secretary Ricardo Jalad, Office of the Civil Defense, Philippines,*
- *Excellencies, Committee of Permanent Representatives and Ambassadors to ASEAN,*
- *Distinguished guests from the ASEAN Sectoral Bodies, ASEAN Dialogue Partners and other partner organizations,*
- *Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Good morning. Selamat pagi.

1. Allow me to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to the Government of the People's Republic of China for their continued commitment and strong support to ASEAN. China is one of ASEAN's most important partners and has been a strategic partner since 2003, contributing significantly to the development and promotion of peace, stability, and prosperity in the region. China is ASEAN's largest trading partner, and last year was ranked as the third-largest source of foreign direct investment and a major contributor of tourists to our region¹. ASEAN and China also cooperate closely towards realizing a sustainable and resilient ASEAN Community that covers a wide-range of fields and activities, including disaster management.

¹ Source: ASEC ASEAN Integration Monitoring Directorate

2. This High-Level Symposium is another contribution to ASEAN Community building efforts as it provides a platform for members of our sectoral bodies, practitioners, policy-makers and think-tanks to exchange views and ideas on pertinent issues related to disaster management. As such, I am pleased to be here at this important event and I thank you all for your presence.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

3. The ASEAN region is prone to different types of disasters including floods, tropical storms, tsunamis, earthquakes and landslides and is considered one of the most disaster prone area in the world. This situation is further exacerbated by the impact of climate change that increases the frequency and intensity of disasters, and raises the vulnerability of communities in the region. The AHA Centre recorded 188 disasters in 2019 in our region. The UNESCAP also states that the Asia-Pacific region is facing complex disaster risks clustered around hotspots, including in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, the overall number of disasters is on an upward trend, largely towards an increase in the number of climate-related events and related environmental degradation². In 2019, heavy monsoon rains caused destructive floods and landslides in Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Vietnam. In the same year, countries surrounding the Mekong river experienced a prolonged dry session and water scarcity leading to agricultural crops failure. A strong magnitude earthquake also hit northwestern Laos near the Thai border, and its impact reverberated as far as Bangkok, Thailand and Ha Noi, Viet Nam. This was an alarming incident for all of us since these countries are very scarcely hit by earthquakes.

4. As the scale of disasters and humanitarian needs across the region intensifies, it is timely for ASEAN to reinforce its cooperation and advance the regional mechanisms in place to ensure effectiveness and efficiency. Indeed, ASEAN has achieved significant progress in its disaster management efforts through the different tools and mechanisms we have established. Key among these is the AHA Centre, the

² Source: UNESCAP: Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2019: The Disaster Riskscape Across Asia-Pacific Pathways for Resilience, Inclusion, and Empowerment (Pages v and 9)

ASEAN-Emergency Response and Assessment Team (ERAT), Disaster Emergency Logistics System for ASEAN (DELSA) to ensure rapid mobilization and distribution of relief items to disaster-affected countries, and the Standard Operating Procedure for Regional Standby Arrangements and Coordination of Joint Disaster Relief and Emergency Response Operations (SASOP).

5. There is also greater scope for the ASEAN Secretariat to be more proactive in order to serve the Member States in times of disaster through the role of the ASEAN Secretary-General as the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance Coordinator (AHAC). The ASEAN Secretariat stands ready for the activation of this mechanism at any time, upon the request of an affected Member State in the event of a major disaster, whether it be a natural disaster or a pandemic. In this capacity, the Secretary-General of ASEAN will spearhead coordination, mobilization of resources, and cooperation among the three pillars of ASEAN Community and with the international actors.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

6. ASEAN is facing unprecedented and increasing risks and challenges in the context of disaster management and humanitarian assistance. Slow onset disasters such as drought have now become an emerging threat in the region. As we live in an interconnected world, we need to stay alert to disasters occurring elsewhere as they may strike our region. The ASEAN statements on the 'Bushfire Crisis in Australia' and 'Statement of the Special ASEAN-China Foreign Ministers' Meeting on the Coronavirus Disease 2019' demonstrate our solidarity and commitment to ensure preparedness and safety of our people. In parallel, we are working to refine ASEAN's policies and strategies on preventing and mitigating such unprecedented risks. This will accelerate ASEAN's efforts in reducing disaster risks, and protect the development gains that we have achieved, and improve the resilience of ASEAN.

7. We as ASEAN have collectively reached many milestones. Yet much remains to be done to strengthen cooperation among our national disaster management agencies, and with external stakeholders. To support the operationalization of the 'ASEAN Declaration on One ASEAN, One Response', ASEAN has established a Joint

Task Force on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (JTF on HADR) to support disaster management efforts to include elements of the political, defense, social welfare, and health sectors. This mechanism shall be further consolidated and strengthened to cope with new and emerging challenges.

8. With the adoption of the 'ASEAN Declaration on Culture of Prevention', ASEAN is also working to foster a culture of resilience and care for the environment to further prevent disaster risks. In relation to this, the Joint Task Force on HADR can focus on coordination and knowledge and resource sharing in the implementation of cross-sectoral initiatives. We look forward to progress in the 'ASEAN Disaster Risk Financing Insurance Roadmap', 'ASEAN Guidelines on Disaster Responsive Social Protection', 'ASEAN Safe School Initiative', 'ASEAN Militaries Ready Group', 'ASEAN Regional Capacity in Disaster Health Management', and many others. I believe these initiatives will deliver positive results when implemented in the spirit of 'One ASEAN, One Response'.

9. In this regard, ASEAN has also taken the initiative to work closely with various stakeholders on existing regional disaster risk financing insurance mechanisms, especially with the ministries of finance, namely the ASEAN Disaster Risk Financing Insurance (ADRFI) Program and the South East Asia Disaster Risk Insurance Facility (SEADRIF). The ADRFI, led by colleagues in the finance sector, and the SEADRIF, a regional initiative set-up by Japan and Singapore with the World Bank as advisors, are key mechanisms for us to better cope with the economic losses caused by disasters. We have made steady progress through the ADRFI in building our capacities in disaster risk resilience, especially the development of Member States' capabilities in ex-ante risk transfer strategies. Furthermore, the SEADRIF is currently finalizing a flood protection insurance program for Myanmar and Lao PDR that will be operationalized in the second half of this year. In addition, the SEADRIF is working towards realizing a 'Public Asset Financial Protection' program for interested countries. It is our hope that all stakeholders present here can further support these endeavors to strengthen our financial resilience in the face of disasters.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. The ASEAN Vision 2025 foresees ASEAN as the global leader in disaster management. Advancing ASEAN's leadership in disaster management and emergency response is based on the organization's ability to be more financially independent, while taking into account our limited capacity and resources. Nevertheless, the ASEAN Secretariat continues to help and assist the Member States in strengthening their capacity in reducing risk and responding to disasters. To address this challenge, ASEAN needs to adopt more innovative approaches in strengthening and diversifying the funding resources in order to meet the current demands. This may include mobilizing support and contribution from people, civil society, and the private sector.

11. In order to encourage support, we need to continue inculcating a 'culture of sharing and caring' among us. On this note, I am pleased to inform that the AHA Centre, with support from the people of Brunei Darussalam, the Government of the Philippines, and the Government of Australia has recently completed the construction of 75 units of permanent houses called the 'ASEAN Village' in Palu, Central Sulawesi. This is part of ASEAN's assistance to the Government of Indonesia's recovery efforts caused by the 2018 earthquake and tsunami in Central Sulawesi. This clearly reflects the strong commitment and support of the Member States and Dialogue Partners to ASEAN. I hope that this will be a catalyst for more effective cooperation and support involving a whole-of-society approach in future ASEAN disaster recovery efforts.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

12. I am also pleased to note the diversity and wealth of experience of the speakers and participants. I am confident that with your expertise and wisdom, the Symposium's outcomes will contribute in shaping more inclusive policies and programs in ASEAN.

13. Having this Symposium at the ASEAN Secretariat also shows our strong commitment towards this endeavor. We are the Secretariat of the people-centered and

people-oriented ASEAN Community. We look forward to having more meetings and face-to-face interactions as a means to strengthen our engagements with stakeholders. With your support and trust, we can have more meetings like this Symposium here at the ASEAN Secretariat.

14. With that, I would like to conclude my remarks and wish you a productive and meaningful discussion over the next two days.

Thank you.