

**MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF ASEAN
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 2012 ASEAN DAY FOR DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND
INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR DISASTER REDUCTION**

Bangkok, 12 October 2012: On this occasion of the 2012 ASEAN Day of Disaster Management and the International Day for Disaster Reduction, allow me to affirm ASEAN's abiding commitment to working towards building resilient nations and communities to disasters.

In commemorating this day with the theme, *"Women and Girls: The Visible Force of Resilience,"* ASEAN pays tribute to all women and girls in the region and around the world for their significant contributions to disaster risk reduction initiatives and resilience building.

Seventy-five percent of displaced populations during disasters and emergencies are women and children. Brought about by gender-specific circumstances and roles, women and girls are often disproportionately impacted by disasters compared to their male counterparts. Aside from economic losses, displacement, reproductive health risks, and gender violence that they usually experience during disasters and emergencies, gender roles also dictate that women take on responsibilities to care for others who have been affected by disasters, including children, elderly, the sick, and the injured, thus adding to their emotional and physical burden.

Despite this perceived vulnerability to disasters, however, women and girls remain a resilient force whose skills and capacities can significantly contribute in disaster risk reduction and building community resilience. Indeed, certain capabilities of women that are derived from their gender-specific social roles have proven beneficial for managing risks and responding to the impacts of disasters. Their social networking abilities and extensive knowledge of their communities are vital for effective risk assessment and early warning. The social task of managing environmental resources and caring for other members of the family are also important capabilities for disaster response as well as for community recovery. Further, as the mainstay of community organisations, women and girls also have unique capacities for leadership and participation which are essential in collective action for reducing disaster risks.

The ASEAN Community will only grow stronger if the potential of women and girls in contributing to the reduction of risks and building resilience in their communities are given serious attention. Thus, we must make it a human development goal of the ASEAN Community to enhance women's capacities for managing risks by lowering their vulnerabilities and by enhancing the gender perspective and turning this into an advantage during disasters.

I wish to exhort ASEAN Member States to make every effort to achieve this goal of enhancing women capacities and fully leverage the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) – a legally binding instrument that provides a proactive regional framework for cooperation, coordination, technical assistance, and resource mobilisation in all aspects of disaster risk reduction and disaster management. The Agreement, which was ratified by all ten ASEAN Member States and entered into force on 24 December 2009, affirms ASEAN's commitment to the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, which adheres to gender perspective, among others, as its cross-cutting principle in building resilience of nations and communities to disasters.

With these tools and instruments, ASEAN stands ready to translate legal agreement into concrete actions and initiatives, and address the unique needs and acknowledge the potential contributions of various stakeholders in the process of disaster risk reduction, response, and recovery. Recognising the roles of women in different stages of disaster management and acknowledging the gender perspective should be at the heart of AADMER Work Programme implementation and monitoring, aimed at making available every possible opportunity for women and girls to be major players in disaster risk reduction in the region.

This week-long commemoration of the ASEAN Day for Disaster Management sends a powerful message and clarion call to raise people's consciousness on the significance of women's roles in disaster risk reduction as well as the importance of *inclusivity, cooperation, collaboration and convergence* in order to achieve the goals of disaster risk reduction in Southeast Asia.

My gratitude goes to Thailand's Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (DDPM) as the lead for this event and this year's Chair of the ASEAN Committee on

Disaster Management, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), the AADMER Partnership Group (APG), and the Thammasat University, in organising this event. This event would have not been possible too without the support of the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management, and our other partners such as the Disabled People's International, the Huairou Commission, the European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO), and the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ). Sincere appreciation is also given to the international community, academic institutions and the civil society for their continued support to ASEAN and the Members States in every level of disaster risk reduction initiatives.

Let us together, as One Community in ASEAN, continue to build a culture of resilience and safety in our region which will echo around the world and stand as a model.

Thank you.
