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**STATEMENT BY
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WORLD CONFERENCE ON DISASTER REDUCTION
KOBE, HYOGO, JAPAN
18-22 JANUARY 2005**

Mr. President,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. At the outset, I wish to convey on behalf of the Government and the people of Thailand our sincere appreciation to the Government of Japan for hosting this important and timely conference as well as the warm hospitality extended to my delegation since our arrival in Japan. I say important because I believe that the outcome of our deliberations will go a long way towards making our world a more predictable and safer place to live for all its inhabitants. I say timely because this conference is being held against the backdrop of one of the worst, if not the worst, natural disasters in our living memory. It is imperative, therefore, for all of us present in this conference to ensure that our deliberations result in concrete actions so that we live up to the expectations of the general public, who are watching us and expecting us to deliver.

Mr. President,

2. The significance of this conference cannot be fully appreciated unless we appreciate the lessons that history has taught us. It was here in Kobe ten years ago that the world witnessed the Great Hanshin-Awaji earthquake, which caused enormous casualties and sufferings. On behalf of the Government and the people of Thailand, I wish to express our sincerest condolences to those who lost their loved ones during this incident. The Thai people share your pains because we are also going through a painful chapter in our national history. The Tsunamis that were unleashed by a huge underwater earthquake off the coast of Sumatra in the morning of 26 December 2004 had brought onto our shores incalculable damages in terms of lives lost, both Thai and foreign, destroyed livelihoods and much more. However, in the midst of these losses, we are deeply touched by the overwhelming tide of compassion and solidarity that the world has given us. No word can ever adequately capture our gratitude for all our true friends who stand by us in time of need.

3. While we are mourning the losses and picking up the pieces, we must also reflect on what went wrong and what should be done to rectify the shortcomings. The Tsunamis had served as a wake-up call for all of us that we can only afford to live with complacency at our own peril. It is indeed a time for action and we must act together.

4. No effort should be spared to prevent the preventable loss of lives due to natural disasters because one preventable death is one death too many. In this regard, Thailand welcomes that a special session on the recent Tsunami disaster will be held during this conference. As a country that was affected by the tragic incident, Thailand is willing to share our lessons learned and what we believe should be done to better prepare ourselves for the future.

5. To this end, Thailand will host the Ministerial Meeting on Regional Cooperation on Tsunami Early Warning Arrangements in Phuket on 28 –29 January 2005 to expedite the process of establishing effective, functioning, real-time regional early warning arrangements with the geographical footprint covering the Indian Ocean rim countries. Since it will be held a few days following the meeting in Kobe, the Phuket Meeting would build on the momentum begun here by lending further political impetus to its outcomes.

6. In our view, it is important that, at the outset, technical and organisational capacity of natural disaster management centres in respective countries in the region should be established or enhanced. This process should be carried out in parallel with the establishment of a regional coordination centre, which could function as a fulcrum for the region-wide network of collaborative national centres. This regional centre should form an integral part of the future global system with the United Nations at its core. In this regard, Thailand would like to propose that the said regional coordination centre should be tasked with assisting regional countries in putting into place requisite technological systems and infrastructures, preparing and conducting training and capacity-building programmes, managing databases, overseeing the central monitoring and communication system.

7. With this in mind, Thailand proposed at the Special ASEAN Leaders' Meeting in Jakarta on 6 January 2005 that the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre (ADPC) be enlarged and utilised as the core of regional early warning arrangements in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia. We have been highly encouraged by the degree of positive response to our proposal during the Meeting and thereafter. In our view, the comparative advantages of the ADPC are manifold. First, the ADPC is an institution that stands poised to realise this mission due to its established networking with key national and international institutions, which has enabled it to mobilize and access new technologies, international best practices and resources effectively. Second, the ADPC has the requisite experience and expertise since it has been involved in building disaster awareness and organising training on disaster management throughout the region for almost two decades.

8. However, we are cognizant of the fact that a significant amount of resources are needed to materialize this objective in an expeditious and sustainable manner. Therefore, Thailand would like to put forward a proposal that a Voluntary Trust Fund on regional early warning arrangements in the Indian Ocean and South East Asia be established to facilitate the mobilization of resources towards this end. Thailand is committed to spearheading this initiative and has already pledged US\$ 10 million as seed money for this Voluntary Trust Fund. We welcome participation from interested parties in this initiative, which would go a long way towards making the Indian Ocean region a safer and a more predictable place for all.

Mr. President,

9. It is clear that the recent Tsunami disaster has effectively increased the relevance of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World. The review report of the Yokohama Strategy covering the period from 1994 to the present indicates that although progress has been made in many areas, they are not adequate and much more commitment is needed to turn the Strategy and Plan of Action into effective implementation. We urge all parties concerned to work towards bridging the implementation gaps identified in this review report. We also welcome the proposed Framework for Action (2005-2015) and are confident that it would provide the international community with an updated blueprint for strategic and systematic action to reducing vulnerabilities and risks from natural disasters.

10. Specifically, Thailand is strongly supportive of the spirit and approach outlined in the review report and the proposed Framework for Action, which places disaster reduction firmly within the context of attaining sustainable development. This linkage is also evident in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the World Summit for Sustainable Development, especially the provisions concerning vulnerability, risk assessment and disaster management. All we need to do is to translate words into deeds.

11. In this regard, Thailand is strongly supportive of the approach that calls for an incorporation of natural disaster risk reduction into national development plans and strategies. Being awakened by the force of Tsunamis, Thailand will inevitably have to revisit our own national development plan and strategies in order to identify shortcomings and devise appropriate adjustments. The disaster also taught us that cultivating a culture of prevention should be an integral part of thinking about sustainable development.

12. It is our view that a genuine culture of prevention should be one that addresses both causes and effects of natural disasters that we know *will* happen due to unsustainable development approaches, and those that we know *can* happen as a result of geological dynamics. As far as human-induced natural disasters are concerned, the trend is not very encouraging. Widespread environmental degradation and destruction has accelerated the pace and volatility of climatic change. Since the last few decades, there has been a steep rise in incidences and severity of natural disasters in relation to the past. We all know that unless a collective action is taken soon to stem the trend, much more sufferings are not beyond expectation because according to the law of nature what is unsustainable will not be sustained.

Mr. President,

13. To cultivate a culture of prevention is to cultivate a wiser way of life. To this end, it requires as follows:

14. *First, know the risk.* At the heart of any preventive strategy lies the awareness of individuals about the potential risks they have to face. Enhancement of awareness of potential natural disaster risk for each community through education should, therefore, be given priority. With the benefit of hindsight, it was clear that many more lives could be saved had people know that the receding sea was an ominous sign of impending Tsunamis. Meanwhile, the media should also be used to inform the general

public about the basic facts that they need to know about the natural disaster risk and how they should act in the face of that risk.

15. *Second, know how to live with the risk.* Being informed about the potential risk is in itself important but not sufficient. An effective management of knowledge is vital to translate knowledge about risk into a robust preparation strategy ranging from encouraging a more sustainable way of life, enhancing early warning capability, designating clear responsibilities among various actors should disaster happens, for example. While the primary responsibility for devising a preparation strategy should rest with the government concerned, the international community should stand ready to offer any assistance that countries, especially the developing countries, may need to be better prepared. Priority should be given to the areas of capacity building and transfer of expertise and requisite technology.

16. *Third, know how to respond to the risk.* Because there is no perfect prevention, therefore, we should remain ever vigilant. Should disaster strike, good preparations would be able to significantly mitigate its risk and, above all, save many preventable casualties from happening. Having a good preparation plan and strategy in place also means a more effective rescue and relief co-ordination and delivery of assistance.

17. *Fourth, know how to recover from the risk.* While effective rehabilitation and reconstruction are vital in times of emergency, a long-term strategy to strengthen the resilience of local communities, especially those situating in vulnerable areas, should also be carried out in earnest. Having strong and resilient local communities would not only make the task of recovery more effective and faster, but would also contribute to an attempt to achieve sustainable development as a whole. In the case of Thailand, we have consistently striven to empower communities at the grass-roots level in order to enable them to maximise their full potentials and become resilient to various challenges. Responses to the Tsunami disaster by local communities in the affected areas of Thailand are a good demonstration of the level of resilience of these communities.

Mr. President,

17. On this note, I wish to emphasise that we must turn this moment of mourning and reflection into a moment for collective action. In Thailand's case, we cannot emphasise enough the urgent need to cultivate a culture of prevention and the need to situate disaster risk reduction within the context of sustainable development planning. Investment in prevention is indeed an investment in life and future. At the end of the day, it is our common future that is at stake.

Thank you.
