

**Statement by Valerie Amos,
Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and
Emergency Relief Coordinator**

(Delivered by Oliver Lacey-Hall,
Head, OCHA-Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific)

**At the Opening Ceremony of the High Level Commemorative Meeting to Reflect on
Key Results and Successes for ADPC and Its Future Role in Supporting Asia's DRR**

**23 March 2011
Plaza Athénée Hotel
Bangkok, Thailand**

Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Officials,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of Valerie Amos, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to you on this occasion of the Silver Jubilee of ADPC. I am doubly honoured to be able to attend this event, given my recent appointment as Head of the OCHA Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific based here in Bangkok. I am looking forward to continuing my already very fruitful association with APDC in this context.

I am particularly delighted to be representing OCHA on this occasion, since 25 years ago, along with other UN partners, OCHA's predecessor, the UN Disaster Relief Coordinator's Office, helped create the Asia Disaster Preparedness Centre. Over the last two-and-a-half decades OCHA has witnessed ADPC grow and engage, with increasing confidence and leadership, in disaster risk reduction in the region. This is indeed a significant accomplishment and very much in line with the aspirations of its founders.

Since its creation in 1986, ADPC has provided disaster management training and implemented a wide range of relevant and timely projects, programmes and disaster risk management services. It has been instrumental in creating a broad network of partner agencies and professionals, providing technical support, building capacities, advocating for regional cooperation and promoting disaster risk reduction among communities at risk.

One of the reasons we have gathered here today is to attempt to chart future priorities for disaster risk reduction in the region, building upon and learning from our common experiences. On this a few thoughts may be useful:

Firstly, my office considers emergency *preparedness* as one of the most essential elements of effective humanitarian response. The adoption of the Hyogo Framework for Action by 168 Governments in 2005 was a major step forward in our collective endeavor

to make the world safer from natural hazards. Key for us is Pillar 5 which notes that being ready to act by strengthening disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels is key.

Secondly, we need to keep in mind that the General Assembly of the United Nations has consistently stated that governments of disaster-affected countries are primarily responsible for responding to disasters. The quickest and most effective elements of response to a disaster are usually provided by the local and national authorities of the affected country. As events in Japan most recently have clearly shown us, the international system's assistance, whether bilateral or multilateral, often represents a modest contribution to the assistance generated from within a country.

So, for OCHA, risk reduction through effective disaster response preparedness is about working with primarily with disaster-affected governments and potentially affected communities, together with regional organizations and donors *before* a disaster strikes, and working out where our actions can best support local and national response. This is exactly what both ADPC and OCHA have been engaged in together, following their respective organizational mandates, with some tangible and positive results. Many countries across the region have radically improved the way in which they respond to disasters in recent years.

But it is an area where we can always strive to do better. For example, we need to look at how we harness new technologies more effectively prior to disasters so that they can be most effectively used during times of crisis, how we better integrate relevant needs assessment methodologies into response preparedness and, most of all, ensure that we are able to listen to the people we are trying to support both during response preparedness exercises as well as when they are at their most vulnerable. In the language of DRR these are perhaps simple concepts - but they are key elements to getting it right.

Thirdly, it is clear that the national preparedness challenges across countries in our region differ greatly in scale and scope. Nevertheless, these challenges do present common opportunities for collaborative actions by OCHA and ADPC and we look forward to exploring these opportunities together. Today, governments' increasing willingness to work with partners presents opportunities for collaborators like the Red Cross and Red Crescent, ADPC and the UN to forge stronger partnership in our work with governments across the region.

Finally, in the Asia Pacific environment today, partnering with a range of actors, and regional institutions like ADPC has indeed contributed immensely to collective efforts in reducing risk. I wish ADPC every success in its endeavours and reconfirm continued OCHA support and partnership.

Thank you.