

**Ambassador Calvert Opening Remarks
Asian Business Forum 2016 (20-21st April 2016)**

Honorable Minister Anupong Paojinda,

Honorable Minister Dr. Pichet Durongkaveroj,

Ambassador Prugel, Mr. Krasae Chanawongse, Mr. Isara Vongkusolkit, Ms. Yasushi
Negishi,

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

I am pleased to be here with you today for this event, which touches on two important areas of engagement for Canada in the region, disaster management and small and medium-sized businesses.

We are all aware that the Asia-Pacific region is particularly vulnerable to natural disasters. Nearly half of the world`s natural disasters occur in this region, and every year, hundreds of thousands of people are affected. From the loss of lives,

homes and livelihoods, to the destruction of buildings and trade infrastructure, natural disasters can devastate entire countries overnight.

Alarming, there is a clear upward trend in the frequency of extreme weather events in the region, and continued development in flood plains, earthquake zones and other high-risk areas are putting more and more people in harm's way, turning routine natural hazard into potential catastrophes.

The development community has done what it can to respond. I am not ashamed to say that Canada is one of the world's leading humanitarian assistance providers, and has consistently supported timely, effective, coordinated, and needs-based assistance in the Asia-Pacific Region, from the earthquakes in New Zealand, Myanmar, and Japan, to the tropical cyclones and severe flooding that hit the Mekong region in 2013, to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines.

However, we know that responding alone is not enough, particularly when it comes to minimizing human casualties and reversing the rising economic costs of disasters. As such, all nations need to put far more emphasis on effective disaster risk reduction.

Canada takes a comprehensive approach to disaster risk reduction and resilience building. We recognize that reducing and mitigating risks and vulnerabilities is far more effective than responding after the fact.

In line with our commitments under the Hyogo Framework for Action, Canada has invested heavily in efforts to strengthen resilience to disasters, including through multilateral and regional initiatives with the UN, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and the Global Environment Facility. Canada has recently stepped up its commitment to these issues through ambitious action on climate change. In November, our Prime Minister announced \$2.65 billion over the next five years to help developing countries tackle the issue of climate change, with a focus on increasing economic resilience and opportunity.

Canada recognizes the expertise and leadership on disaster management that resides in this part of the world. This is why we have made disaster risk reduction a key focus for Canada's regional development programming with ASEAN.

In 2013, we launched a \$10 million Integrated Disaster Risk Management Fund, which is managed by the Asian Development Bank and supports innovative regional solutions for disaster risk management in Southeast Asia. The Fund highlights Canada's stronger call for effective multi stakeholder engagement in reducing the disaster risks, with important emphasis on the private sector as a key partner.

Resilient businesses represent a crucial part of wider efforts to build safer communities and more secure societies. This is especially true of the small and medium-sized firms which are key drivers for growth and job creation – in Asia as in Canada. Their ability to manage in the wake of disasters weighs heavily on the overall economic disruption that natural disasters can inflict on increasingly integrated regional production and supply chains.

SMEs remain especially vulnerable to external shocks, due to a number of factors such as limited resources and risk spread. But these are generally nimble organizations that, given the right information and skills, can adapt to such shocks by internalizing related risks in their business plans and practices.

In recognition of this potential, Canada is pleased to support the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center's work to 'Strengthening Disaster Resilience of Small and Medium Enterprises in Asia' through the Integrated Disaster Risk Management Fund. By drawing on the experiences and collective views of government officials, private sector actors, and other relevant stakeholders from across the region, we are confident that we can help improve the SME resilience and safeguard livelihoods in times of crisis.

These efforts dovetail with Canada's new commitment to leadership on sustainable and climate-resilient economies, including our Paris pledge, as well as Canada's expanded engagement with ASEAN on sustainable economic growth, including our support to the ASEAN Strategic Action Plan for SMEs.

I would like to thank the German Government for its partnership in this initiative, and acknowledge Germany for its constructive global engagement and strong partnership in support of inclusive growth through sustainable and resilient businesses and economies. Thanks also to all the supporting partners of this session and the 2016 Asian Business Forum on Risk Reduction and Resilience Building.

I wish you all a productive engagement today and look forward to advancing this initiative and its findings to ensure we take every opportunity improve the resilience of SMEs in ASEAN.

Thank you.