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Regional Conference on Disaster Broadcasting : 13-15 October 1999, Bangkok : [welcome remarks]

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Regional Conference on *Disaster Broadcasting in Asia*, Bangkok, 13-15 November 1999.

Welcome Remarks by Vijay Menon, Secretary-General, Asian Media Information and Communication Centre, Singapore

It gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you to this Regional Conference on Disaster Broadcasting, organized jointly by AMIC and APDC, with the support of the Hosono Foundation.

We are meeting at a singularly appropriate time as we move towards the final year of the International Decade for ^{ural} ~~Natural~~ Disaster Reduction. We can cast a backward glance at the efforts and achievements of the past nine years and look forward to a concluding year of accelerated activity to attain the goals set out.

Recent earthquakes in Turkey and Taiwan, and floods in Bangladesh and the Philippines, underscore the immediacy of the issue, the vastness of the problem and the urgency of the need for action. Each disaster tells a tale of tragedy, of death and devastation, of lives lost and property destroyed.

In his statement on the occasion of the International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction, which is today, the United Nations Secretary General has pointed out that some natural disasters are not natural, and human actions -- such as those that give rise to global warming, deforestation or the destruction of wetlands -- have greatly increased the risk of certain catastrophes. Above all, he stresses that we must build a culture of prevention that will attack the roots of the problem.

The Tampere Declaration issued in 1991 recognized the critical role of the mass media in providing public information to communities at risk and their broader role in education and opinion formation. But there is gap between the potential and the actual, and we must strive to attack the causes. Chief among these is the need for training of communication practitioners, whether they be from the media or government or NGOs. The need for network building is also important as teamwork is the key to success..

In Asia, we have an added problem. Poverty and illiteracy place millions of the urban poor and the rural isolated beyond the pale of ^{at} ~~convention~~ mass media, certainly beyond the printed word. Broadcasting thus plays a crucial role in disaster communication in the region.

We are glad to have as our partner for this important conference, the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre. Since its establishment in 1986, APDC has served as a focal point in the region for promoting disaster awareness and the development of local capabilities for disaster management. We hope we can build upon this partnership and continue our fruitful collaboration into the next millenium, for the benefit of the region.

The Hosono Bunka Foundation deserves a special word of appreciation for the cooperation and support it has extended to this conference. Our association with the HBF dates back over a decade. We are grateful to the Foundation for its understanding and encouragement,

We have with us representatives from a dozen countries, all of whom have agreed to share their experiences, their insights and their knowledge. We thank you and your institutions for your positive response and urge you to utilize the opportunity provided this conference not only for interaction over the three-day period but also for networking in the future.

AMIC, for the benefit of those who do not know us, is a regional NGO, a non-profit organization and a registered charity, based in Singapore. Our focus is on media and information. We seek to examine and promote the use of communication skills and their practical application in the region. We were founded in 1971, with the support of the Government of Singapore and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, an independent foundation in Germany. Our activities cover documentation, publications, research and seminars and institutional development programmes. SIDP has organized this conference and I would like to recognize my colleague, Joe Carlos, for his untiring efforts to make this conference a success.

As has been remarked in a different context, disaster relief is good, disaster prevention is better, but preparedness is essential to mitigate and minimize the consequences of a disaster. It is our hope that our deliberations will contribute to this end.
