



ASEAN Day for Disaster Management and the International Day for Disaster Reduction for 2008

Opening Remarks by Laila Ismail Khan, Resident Coordinator a.i.

14 October 2008

*Mr. Laoly Phaiphentyoua, Acting Minister of Labor and Social Welfare
Distinguished guests, ladies, and gentlemen:*

This celebration takes place in a year that has seen more than its fair share of natural catastrophes, not least here in Lao PDR. This country has recently experienced its worst flooding in living memory, while earthquakes, tropical cyclones, and flooding, have struck others in the region.

The August Floods seriously undermined the livelihoods of many Lao families. Crops, aquaculture, livestock, and agro-forestry were all badly hit. Damage to housing, health, nutrition, and sanitation were also severe. Flooding may be a regular phenomenon in Lao PDR, and the population is certainly resilient. Even so, the floods have dealt a severe blow to the development prospects of a large proportion of this country.

The observance of this day, which falls on the anniversary of the massive 2005 earthquake in South Asia, reinforces the need to recall the lessons we have learned on Disaster Preparedness, Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Response.

Almost four years have passed since Governments agreed to the Hyogo framework for Action. This key document aims to reduce our collective vulnerability to natural hazards. However, we must do much more to turn commitments on paper into actions that will spare lives and livelihoods when the next major disaster strikes. Now more than ever, when we are trying to accelerate national and international efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, Disaster Risk Reduction needs to be acknowledged and incorporated as a key plank of that work. The threats posed by climate change – including increasing droughts, floods, and storms – increases the urgency further still, particularly in the world's poorest, most vulnerable communities.

The World Disaster Reduction Campaign for 2008–2009 focuses on making “Hospitals Safe from Disasters.” When health facilities are damaged, so, too, is our ability to improve material and child health and to provide other essential health services. In resilient communities, health systems are better able to withstand natural hazards. We need to mobilize society at every level to reduce risk and protect health facilities so that they can save lives.

I urge all partners to step up implementation of the Hyogo Framework. Disaster Risk Reduction is everybody's business. Only by investing in tangible risk reduction measures can we reduce vulnerability and protect development. On this International Day, let us renew our dedication to this vital task.

Thank you.