

Kingdom of Cambodia
Nation – Religion – King

Address

by

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Prime Minister, Royal Government of Cambodia

at the

***Sixth International Meeting of Asian Disaster Reduction Center
and the Third Meeting of the Secretariat of International
Strategy for Disaster Reduction***
Siem Reap, 4-6 February 2004

*Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen
National and International Guests:*

I am delighted to join you all today in the *Sixth International Meeting of Asian Disaster Reduction Center (ADRC) and the Third Meeting of Secretariat of International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR)*.

On behalf of the Royal Government and People of Cambodia, I warmly welcome all the delegates from the member-countries of the ADRC, the representatives of UN agencies, the donor community, and international and national organizations, to the ancient land of the Angkor!

These two international meetings are important venues for the sharing and exchange of information and experiences, as well as the appraisal of the performance of their respective countries in programs to reduce the adverse impacts of natural disasters.

Cambodia became a member of ADRC in 2000, soon after the ADRC was established in 1998 with support by the Government of Japan. Cambodia's membership has resulted in significant strengthening and expansion of disaster management capacity in the country. Such improvements have come about through Cambodia's participation in the international activities of the ADRC.

May I express Cambodia's deepest thanks to the Japanese Government, the ADRC and donor community and all development partners in helping build the capacity of the *National Committee for Disaster Management*.

I also thank all development partners for all your contributions to Cambodia in various forms: material, technical as well as humanitarian.

These have all strengthened the government's programs in easing the suffering of the Cambodian people affected by various calamities.

*Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:*

Your presence and participation in these meetings is another step forward in our common efforts in disaster management. In just three days you have learned a lot from the presentations and discussions on that our joint efforts will help our entire region facilitate the achievement of sustainable development across our countries in Asia.

I have been greatly concerned by the many calamities that the developing countries have suffered in recent years. We have suffered typhoons, floods, and adverse changes in climate, droughts, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. In 2003, unseasonable cold caused many deaths in Bangladesh, India and Nepal. There were storms in the Philippines and earthquakes in Indonesia, Japan, China and Myanmar. In late 2003 Iran suffered a horrible earthquake that took many thousands of human lives.

Cambodia was fortunate in 2003 that the serious floods of 2000 – 2002 were not repeated. Yet still we suffered droughts, heavy rainfalls and typhoons. The floods of 2000 were the worst in 70 years, as documented by many agencies including National Committee for Disaster Management, the UN Disaster Management Team, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent, Mekong River Commission, affected not only Cambodia, but also the four riparian countries of the Mekong River basin – Lao PDR, Thailand, Cambodia and Viet Nam.

However, flooding is not the only peril threatening Cambodian life. Droughts are also a continuing threat. In the future disastrous floods and droughts could again devastate Cambodia due to the deterioration of the environment and our weak flood control system and water resource management.

Indeed, the Royal Government of Cambodia considers disaster management as a key component of its social and economic planning. Floods and droughts have caused serious damage and loss to Cambodia, and endanger the Royal Government's efforts to enhance the economy and well being of Cambodian society. Cambodia's resources are very limited and these have to be shared across a wide range of development programs such as roads and bridges, and relief for affected communities. It is clear that natural calamities have worsened poverty in Cambodia and thus effective disaster management would be an important contribution to poverty reduction.

*Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:*

I support full-fledged programs for the management of disasters. It would be an important step in the reduction of losses and damage due to disasters. I agree that our Asian nations do need assistance to view disaster management as integral to broad development management. The strengthening of such a view will be assisted by efforts at building:

- (i) cooperation and collaboration, and
- (ii) partnerships.

Indeed, disaster management is all about cooperation and coordination, since there is no single institution nor organization that can successfully manage disasters alone. Cooperation and coordination are necessary in preparations in the pre-disaster period – including the allocation of equipment and transport, training of professional staff to be ready, preparation of accommodations for victims, information systems, health services, and so on. Cooperation will not only reduce destruction and damage but also minimize overlapping of work and responsibilities and thus avoid waste of scarce resources.

It should be noted that the armed forces play a significant role in disaster management. The saving of lives in calamities by the armed forces has been generally effective. The management structure of the armed forces is responsive to the requirements of disaster management – public emergency services, engineering support, transport, search and rescue, and also the provision of health care, hygiene measures, food distribution, portable water supply and so forth and so on.

The Royal Cambodian Armed Forces has already contributed to disaster management. Yet we still have some work to do to ensure that the contributions of the RCAF are as effective as possible, including the further clarification of roles, responsibilities, approaches, preparations and the adequate provision of supplies and equipment.

Partnership among all stakeholders is crucial in disaster management. Technical exchange and the sharing of resources is important because the needs for resources, funding and technical skills usually exceeds the demands.

Moreover, there is a need for NGOs and private sector to play a role in disaster management, especially in the provision of their resources and skills. The mitigation of the effects of disasters is not limited to the rehabilitation of physical infrastructures, but should extend to the building of capacity for disaster management, including capacity in prevention and public awareness.

Indeed, efforts to promote community participation and awareness are crucial since these are key to the mitigation of loss in human lives and damage to properties.

*Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen:*

To protect lives and property from floods, the Royal Government of Cambodia has constructed dams to protect Phnom Penh city and its surrounding areas. Moreover, the Royal Government has also built a canal in Western Phnom Penh to drain rainwater and to stock water for household use. These infrastructures have been largely financed by grants from the Government of Japan. These grants have enabled the Royal Government to minimize flood disasters by constructing roads on higher foundations and installing drainage systems. Schools, pagodas and health centers have been built in areas of elevations higher than flood levels. These areas now serve as safe havens in times of flood.

May I now express my sincere appreciation to H.E. NHIM Vanda, the First Vice President of the National Disaster Management Committee in building of partnership with the Asian Disaster Reduction Center. I also appreciate the *Sixth International Conference of the ADRC* and the *Third Meeting of International Strategy for Disaster Reduction* as key steps towards the *Global Conference on Disaster Reduction 2005*. This meeting is a good opportunity for the ADRC member countries to implement Total Disaster Risk Management to raise public knowledge on disaster risk throughout all sectors.

With the aim of boosting the success of disaster management, may I underline several key points that the concerned agencies and organizations in Cambodia should implement:

1. Disaster management must be acknowledged by all, especially the national management team, to encourage all sectors and levels to be prepared to combat consequences and impacts arising from risks. The disaster management systems must be organized.
2. Increase capacity in forecasting and disseminating weather indicators such as rain and flood to advise all ministries-institutions in charge and the people to take timely preparations to mitigate the effects of natural disasters. The effective use of advanced forecasting technology should be encouraged.
3. Further strengthen relations and information exchange at the national, regional and international levels through widening cooperation in disaster management, including consultation on activities by one country, which may be harmful to neighboring countries.
4. Build partnerships among disaster management institutions and United Nations agencies, countries and donors, to improve education and public knowledge on the risks of disasters, warning systems, related risks and other important components of Disaster Prevention Programs.

In closing, on behalf of the Royal Government and people of Cambodia, let me once again express my thanks and congratulations to the Government of Japan, the ADRC, Secretariat of ISDR and all member-countries of the ADRC, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen present here in these meetings in the Land of Angkor.

I wish you all, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, good health and a memorable visit to Angkor. I also wish you progress, prosperity and harmony in the management of disasters!

Thank you.