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Statement from U.S. on Managing Risk through Sound Public Investments

I. Introduction

- Chairman, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen: Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today about this important issue. Before I begin, I would like to thank and congratulate the Kingdom of Thailand and the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) for hosting the 6th Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction. I am honored to be a part of a group of such eminent participants, who have come together at this conference to address the critical topic of disaster risk reduction, and to ensure that we all work to move this global agenda forward.
- As previous speakers have highlighted, the vulnerability of this region to natural disasters is increasing. The Asia-Pacific region is the most disaster-prone region in the world. The scale and complexity of natural disasters continues to challenge the international aid community. In recent years, we have struggled with typhoons, tsunamis, massive flooding, volcanoes and earthquakes. In most of these cases, it is the most vulnerable segment of the population that suffers, as their homes are destroyed, and their lives uprooted.
- Over the past decade, we have seen an upward trend for climate-related disasters. For the ten-year period between 1964 and 1973, a total of 23 floods were recorded in ASEAN member states, affecting a total of just over 5 million people. Forty years later, between 2004 and 2013, 239 floods were recorded in ASEAN countries, affecting more than 63 million people. For the same ten-year period between 1964 to 1973, 36 storms affected just over 9 million people; 40 years later, 139 storms affected over 84 million people.
- As urbanization and climate change continue, the Asia-Pacific will face increasing losses unless disaster risk management and climate change adaptation are incorporated into the strategic planning that takes place at all levels of a society. And despite the fact that many countries in this region have made considerable economic progress since the signing of the

Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA) in 2005, the scale and frequency of natural disasters are likely to result in increasing economic losses.

- The United States Government, primarily through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), is dedicated to supporting disaster risk reduction and response efforts in Asia. We seek to partner closely with national governments in the region, and to work alongside both the public and private sectors to reduce the economic and social impacts of disasters. Our aim is to build resilience in disaster-prone communities around the globe, incorporating disaster risk reduction into both our humanitarian assistance programs and into our longer-term development programs. We seek to help populations recover faster from the impacts of natural disasters, with less external assistance.

II. Public Investments in Disaster Risk Management

- The great economic gains made in the Asia-Pacific region since the signing of the Hyogo Framework for Action make disaster risk management even more important for governments in order to protect these investments.
- In rapidly developing economies, the costs associated with disaster-related damages to publicly funded infrastructure, such as schools, hospitals, roads, bridges, electricity, and water supplies, can be severe. Protecting these investments is critical to reduce both direct and indirect costs of disasters.
- We know that public investments in infrastructure, social services, and critical lifelines must be done with disaster risk considered so that these investments are resilient and cost-effective over the long term.
 - For example, upgrading the drainage and water infrastructure in a rapidly urbanizing area can both reduce a city's vulnerability to floods, but also improve water quality and reduce the likelihood of water-borne disease.
- Due to Asia's rapid urbanization and the advancing effects of climate change, city managers are recognizing the benefits of integrating disaster risk financing and management into all areas of municipal life.
 - In India, for example, USAID is proud to be a partner with the government and UN to bolster climate and disaster risk management in six cities, including through hazard risk and vulnerability assessments, strengthening early warning systems, and building disaster response capacity in approximately 360 municipal wards.
- Governments must also invest in raising awareness among their citizens of disaster risks and how those risks can affect the lives and livelihoods of communities. Effective communication can demystify disaster risk management and turn it into something that all people can incorporate into their lives, no matter their profession, age, or level of education.
 - In Thailand, USAID worked with Save the Children to distribute 10,000 Disaster Risk Reduction storybooks to students in flood-prone provinces. These storybooks used animal characters to highlight what communities could do to help prepare for flood situations, highlighting both positive and negative practices during emergencies. After

distribution of these books, educators within the school systems worked with children on how to prepare for disasters, and both students and teachers are optimistic that they are far better prepared to deal with flooding in the future.

- Within the U.S. Government, we place priority on ensuring that governments have the capacity to manage risk effectively. We support the efforts of leaders to incorporate risk analysis and risk management measures into all decision making and planning processes. These efforts bring together a range of stakeholders from government, private sector and civil society to collectively analyze potential climate impacts and develop a plan to manage risk in a way that minimizes disaster losses and fosters economic growth and poverty reduction. USAID has supported this approach in cities such as Hue, Vietnam, and Udon Thani, Thailand.

III. Resilient Investments

- Finally, the investments needed by many medium and large cities to promote adaptation to climate change greatly exceed government resources. In order to foster adaptation in a rapidly changing environment, governments and the private sector need access to financing to support resilient infrastructure and ecosystem investments that could mitigate the impact of climate-related hazards.
 - USAID assists countries to access international financing by helping them to build their technical expertise to design bankable projects and access international funds.
 - USAID also works at the community-level, in places like Indonesia and Vietnam, training coastal communities to better manage their natural resources to reduce coastal hazards and access local government resources for implementation. This includes the rehabilitation of mangrove forests and the adoption of land use practices that slow, stop, and reverse emissions from deforestation and degradation of forests in delta areas.

IV. Closing Remarks

- In closing, as the international community moves towards a post-2015 Hyogo Framework for Action landscape, the U.S. Government is supportive of efforts to establish and strengthen national platforms for disaster risk reduction. As 2015 approaches, we are pleased and impressed with the wide level of interest on the part of national governments and other partners, including civil society organizations and the private sector, in participating in post-HFA discussions.
- The post-HFA focus on public policies to address disaster risk is a welcome step, reinforced by all levels of government, and supported by civil society, the private sector, and academic institutions.
- The United States looks forward to advancing the outcomes of this conference. Again, thank you for the opportunity to address all of you today. I am honored to be a part of this timely and important event.