

**Opening Statement by Dr Sai Mauk Kham,
Vice-President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar
On the occasion of the International Day for Disaster
Reduction 2011
13 October 2011**

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning to you all!

Today's auspicious ceremony commemorates International Day for Disaster Reduction which was designated by the United Nations to be held on 13 October every year. Myanmar observed the International Day for Disaster Reduction at the national level for the first time in 2010 and we are holding the event this year for the second time.

This year's theme for the International Day for Disaster Reduction is "*Children and Young People as Partners for Disaster Risk Reduction*". The aim of the theme is to inform the world that children and young people are partners in reducing disaster risk.

It is known that, at the global scale, disasters affect approximately 230 million people and an average of 85,000 lives is lost every year. Annual damages cost about one-fourth of global GDP. The flood of January 2011 in Australia is unprecedented in its history so the Government of Australia had to reform its disaster management mechanism. Christchurch Earthquake with the magnitude of 6.3 Richter scale in New Zealand caused great damages to the buildings which were constructed with the strict building code of New Zealand. Again, in March 2011, the Tohoku

Earthquake of magnitude 9.2 Richter scale, tsunami and nuclear radiation in Japan also shocked the world. Typhoon Irene that crossed Haiti, the Dominican Republic and the United States during last August affected 800,000 people and also caused damages. In eastern Pacific Ocean, Nanmadol Typhoon also hit China and Taiwan during the last week of August.

As for Myanmar, Cyclone Nargis that struck the country on 2nd and 3rd May 2008 caused great devastation in Ayeyawaddy and Yangon Regions with severe impacts on the socio-economic lives of the people as well as caused great loss to the nation's economy. Similarly, Cyclone Giri that hit Rakhine State in October 2010 also caused a lot of damages in the livelihood and housing sectors. The Union Government, Regional Government, United Nations Agencies and International and local Non-government Organizations are making collaborative efforts in reconstruction measures for cyclone-hit areas. One significant point is that, based on the experiences of Cyclone Nargis, the number of death and loss could be reduced although the Cyclone was violent because of effective preparedness when the cyclone warning was received.

The earthquake that struck Eastern Shan State in March 2011 caused many damages in the housing sector, resulting in damages and losses of 3000 million Kyats. The Vice President and Union Ministers, the Government of Shan State and responsible officials visited the quake-hit area many times, and gave guidance on search and rescue, relief, recovery and reconstruction work. That is why, the recovery tasks for Eastern Shan State earthquake have progressed rapidly.

Furthermore, region-wide floods occurred as a result of heavy rains during mid-monsoon of this year, and many flood victims

had to take shelter in relief camps. The President and Vice President visited these areas and gave encouragement to the flood victims, and provided them with necessary assistance. The President gave guidance to relevant State/Region governments and line ministries to consult and collaborate each other in fulfilling the needs of the flood victims. Rehabilitation of the agriculture sector which was destroyed by the flood is also being carried out using multi-stakeholder cooperation approach.

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From these disaster experiences, it is very clear that the destructive power of today's disasters has great impact on the destruction to the development already gained, and severe effect on the socio-economic lives of the people. While Myanmar is trying to strive for rural development and poverty alleviation, the disasters caused damages to livelihoods of individual citizens and critical infrastructures of the affected regions. Thus, it is important to link up the disaster reduction endeavours with poverty alleviation programmes so as not to hinder development tasks.

Myanmar is cooperating with global and regional partners in disaster risk reduction to become a disaster resilient country. In global perspective, Myanmar is implementing Hyogo Framework for Actions which was laid down by the World Conference on Disaster Reduction held in January 2005 in Kobe, Japan. In the ASEAN region, Myanmar is a member of the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM). Myanmar has signed and ratified

the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER). At the national level, Myanmar has already drafted the Myanmar Action Plan on Disaster Risk Reduction (MAPDRR).

The Union Government has given guidance to take proactive actions in relief, recovery and long-term prevention for potential disasters that may be caused unexpectedly by climate change. Myanmar has re-organized Myanmar Disaster Preparedness Agency on 20th April, 2011. The Myanmar National Search and Rescue Committee has also been formed on the same day. The Standing Orders on Disaster Management was also issued in 2009.

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The Ministry of Education is undertaking school safety initiatives, in partnership with UNICEF, UNESCO, Save the Children and other agencies.

Since 2010, Myanmar has participated in the ASEAN Regional Drawing Competition, and the national winner from Myanmar attended the commemoration ceremony of the ASEAN Day for Disaster Management and the International Day for Disaster Reduction held in Bangkok, Thailand. This year, the Ministry of Education, UNDP and UNESCO jointly held Essay and Drawing Contests for students, with a view to raising awareness and interest in disaster risk reduction. The winners will be presented prizes during this ceremony.

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement is now drafting the Disaster Management Law, with technical support from Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC), and consultations with disaster-related government departments, legal experts, representatives from United Nations agencies and International Non-government Organizations.

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As a way forward, the government of Myanmar will do its utmost for building a better disaster management mechanism. In doing so, we consider that technical and financial support from international community is essential for this purpose.

In conclusion, I would like to urge Myanmar Disaster Preparedness Agency, relevant line ministries, State/ Region governments, United Nations agencies, international and local Non-Government Organizations and donors to consolidate multi-stakeholder collaboration in disaster risk reduction, prevention, response, and recovery and reconstruction measures so as to achieve the National Disaster Risk Reduction Goal as stated in MAPDRR i.e. *“To make Myanmar Safer and more Resilient against Natural Disasters”*.

Thank you.