

**Country Statement by H.E. Chua Siew San, Ambassador of the Republic of Singapore to the Kingdom of Thailand, at the Sixty-ninth Session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok, 25 April - 1 May 2013**

*Opportunities to Build Resilience to Natural Disasters  
and Major Economic Crises*

Mr Chairman

Excellencies

Distinguished delegates

The Singapore delegation would like to express our appreciation to the United Nations ESCAP for organising the 69<sup>th</sup> Session of the ESCAP Commission, and to the Government of Thailand for hosting this important event.

Mr Chairman,

2        It is most timely for us to focus on the theme of resilience. In the last few years, against the backdrop of a slow global economic recovery, the Asia Pacific region has been hit hard by many natural disasters. Massive floods in Southeast Asia, the Great East Japan earthquake and the ensuing nuclear disaster, and the earthquake in Sichuan Province in China just nine days ago, are stark reminders of the need for countries to be vigilant and to enhance their national resilience. We would do well to take a holistic look at our policies on Disaster Risk Reduction and see how these can be integrated with economic and social protection policies.

3        Disaster Risk Reduction is important for mitigating the damage caused by natural disasters. This includes proactive measures such as investing in early warning systems, preparedness, and social safety nets. However, the Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2012 found that Disaster Risk Reduction policies have not been consistently applied across the region. The Report also found that countries that did not give priority to Disaster Risk

Reduction fared more poorly in coping with natural disasters and major economic crises. Our region's rapid economic growth will in fact exacerbate our vulnerability to natural disasters if we do not have adequate safeguards. And where resources have had to be diverted for recovery efforts, the growth of the affected countries has been impeded. In some cases, the deleterious effects have slowed down the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. We can therefore see the value in incorporating elements of Disaster Risk Reduction and Sustainable Development into our national development strategies.

#### Singapore's Experience

4 Singapore has a land area of only 700 square kilometres and a population of over 5 million people. Singapore is relatively free from natural disasters but we are not spared from urban hazards, man-made disasters and terrorist-related threats. We are one of the most densely populated countries and cities in the world. As such, there is a greater need for Disaster Risk Reduction as the impact of disasters on the people would be magnified. Being a very open economy heavily dependent on trade, we are also vulnerable to major economic crises, not only in our region but also beyond.

5 In learning from the experience of other countries, Singapore has developed a holistic "Total Defence" strategy - comprising military, civil, economic, social and psychological defence. Total Defence emphasises that every citizen has a part to play in overcoming national challenges, including disasters and economic crises. Disaster Risk Reduction is an important component of this effort. The Singapore Government has a regulatory framework intended to minimise the effects of disasters and strengthen the resilience of our society. We have strict building codes and conduct regular checks on the structural safety of buildings. The Singapore Civil Defence Force heads an inter-agency response committee and is responsible for contingency plans in the event of disasters. Regular emergency exercises are conducted and the community is frequently engaged to build resilience at the grassroots level.

6 We have also fine-tuned our economic policies to incorporate various protection measures for the most economically vulnerable. We give



priority to human resource development and the protection of vulnerable groups, such as the disabled and economically disadvantaged. Under our Enabling Masterplan 2012-2016, the Singapore Government provides training schemes and financial incentives for employers to hire and retain persons with disabilities so that they can better withstand serious economic setbacks.

Mr Chairman,

7        Disasters, whether natural or man-made, know no boundaries. Singapore believes that it is important to share knowledge and step up cooperation so that we can all deal more effectively with future crises. Singapore has been sharing our experience in disaster management with other countries bilaterally through the Singapore Cooperation Programme. The Singapore Cooperation Programme has a wide variety of training courses, including humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, pandemic preparedness, urban search and rescue, fire fighting, and mitigation of hazardous materials. Singapore also collaborates with developed countries and international organisations, such as the US, Japan and the Commonwealth Secretariat, to jointly conduct training courses for other countries on Disaster Risk Reduction and emergency response.

8        At the regional level, Singapore believes that economic integration helps to build resilience when we are faced with major economic crises. One important element in this effort is the realisation of the ASEAN Economic Community by 2015. The stronger, more robust single market of ASEAN, with 600 million people, will also help ASEAN member states to mitigate the negative impact of adverse economic developments elsewhere in the world. The building blocks to achieve this larger objective include the ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement to create a more stable and secure investment environment, the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services which promotes services liberalisation, and the ASEAN Connectivity Master Plan to integrate transport and communications infrastructure, as well as institutional and people-to-people linkages. To ensure that the connectivities remain strong, Singapore has committed over US\$135 million until 2015 under the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) to close the development gap among ASEAN countries.