

NDMC Earthquake Simulation Exercise

**Opening Remarks by Mr. Knut Ostby, Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Myanmar
Hilton Hotel, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar**

Thursday, 1 February 2018

Excellency Minister of Social Welfare Relief and Resettlement, Professor Dr U Win Myat Aye, Deputy Minister U Soe Aung

Director General of the Disaster Management Department, Dr U Ko Ko Naing, I congratulate the department on its new structure and organizing this event.

Officials from State, Regional and national governments, the Military and colleagues from Civil Society, Myanmar Red Cross Society, humanitarian organizations the private sector, UN colleagues Distinguished Invited Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

A very good morning to you all. Mingalarbar.

It is my greatest pleasure to take part in welcoming you all to this 2-day Earthquake Simulation Exercise, organized under the auspices of the National Disaster Management Committee (NDMC) and supported by the Disaster Management Department, the Mandalay government and the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT). As stated in the invitation letter, the main objective of this event is to test the readiness of the NDMC working committees and the regional Government towards an effective response to the potential impacts of national disasters, an example has chosen in this case as a major earthquake in Mandalay, in coordination with other partners.

It is well known that Myanmar is one of the countries most at risk of natural disasters in the Asia-Pacific region. The Mandalay Region is located in one of those areas prone to earthquakes, which have the potential to impact large numbers of people living there and in surrounding areas. Fortunately, past earthquakes that have recently occurred in the country have recorded comparably low numbers of casualties, however, preparedness efforts remain a high priority given the unpredictability of earthquakes which have large impacts on lives of people in the country and the need to strengthen response capacities drawing on the expertise of multiple stakeholders.

While simulation exercises in Myanmar are not new, but this is the first time a simulation exercise on an earthquake is being organized on this size and scale. It follows the joint development of the Mandalay earthquake scenario plan by the regional government, Myanmar Red Cross Society, CSOs and humanitarian partners, and subsequent emergency preparedness activities including the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). This Simulation Exercise would allow us to think through the required response and actual capacities in relation to Search and Rescue, Medical Response, Relief and Rehabilitation operations as well as coordination arrangements. This includes coordination arrangements with the Military, who always have a very important and large role to play in case of large disasters, for example, response to the devastating floods in 2015. These actions will allow us to get ready for a strong earthquake, something which has a likelihood to happen, in view of the preparedness levels of the Mandalay regional government with the support of the national government, and other partners, and agree on additional resources we may require.

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I have experience in the past taking part in many simulation exercises and such experiences are largely useful to identify and to know how to relate with partners and different stakeholders, and how to improve

the coordination system as well as those exercises help us to make ready to respond the disasters effectively and efficiently.

The World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 brought together a wide range of stakeholders to redefine the way we work in order to prevent human suffering globally through emergency preparedness and response. As you know, we can do so much at preparedness stage, but when emergency situation occurs, there will be limitations on what we can do. It would be too late if we were prepared now for future disasters. I am pleased to see that a great deal of work is already underway and that partners are embracing new ways of working to respond to crisis, in spite of the challenges that we face collectively. As one of the priorities identified at the Summit, the Humanitarian Country Team has embedded emergency preparedness in the Humanitarian Response Plan signaling our commitment to these ideas. This involves a commitment from the Humanitarian Country Team to work more closely with the Government to build national capacity, particularly in disaster preparedness and response.

In closing, I would like to encourage all of us to view this as a unique opportunity to think creatively about how to work better together in terms of earthquake preparedness and how to apply elements of the International Disaster Response Law, as well as clarify channels for the receipt of international assistance when it is needed. The clearer are the procedures for the incoming humanitarian assistance during emergencies and the faster it comes in, the better for the government to speed up the response in line with Myanmar rules and regulations.

I hope this is a good exercise and a good learning for everyone who participates in this. There are ongoing activities such as supporting the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement with preparedness and disaster management activities as well as with the Emergency Response Preparedness Plan and we commit to continue the support and coordination with all stakeholders. I would like to wish you all success in this simulation exercise, including those from the national and sub-national government, the Military, humanitarian organizations. I would like to thank the organizers and facilitators for their tremendous jobs and for dedication of their time and effort to make this event possible.

Thank you very much. Kyay Zu Tin Ba Tal.

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