



SPEECH

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Opening Address by Major-General Lim Chuan Poh, Chief of Defence Force, at the Opening Ceremony of the Asean Regional Forum (ARF) Combined Humanitarian Assistance Response Training (CHART) Course, 21 Aug 2000, 0900 Hrs, at Marina Mandarin Hotel

21 Aug 2000

Good morning distinguished guests, participants from the ARF, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

Introduction

It gives me great pleasure to be here this morning to officiate at the opening of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Combined Humanitarian Assistance Response Training, or the CHART, Course.

First of all, let me welcome our friends from the ARF to Singapore. We would also like to extend our appreciation to the US Centre of Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance, a renowned organisation certified by the World Health Organisation, for jointly conducting this course with the SAF Medical Corps.

Humanitarian Relief Co-operation

Ladies and gentlemen, we are living in a very different regional environment today - one that has been radically altered by the forces of globalisation. Trade liberalisation and information technology have shrunk the globe and brought about a greater degree of security interdependence among states. At the same time, security challenges have become more diverse and multifaceted in an interconnected world - political, economic and even environmental factors increasingly have an impact on the security of nations. These new strategic realities dictate that closer cross-border co-operation and multi-dimensional responses are increasingly needed to ensure national and regional security.

Humanitarian relief is one such area where a multi-agency, collective international response is often required. The many large-scale disasters that have occurred in this region serve to

remind us that disasters, natural or man-made, are and will continue to be a common challenge to countries in the Asia-Pacific. These major disasters do not respect political boundaries, and they have the potential to inflict damage on local and regional economies, as well as the social stability and security of states. Partnership and co-operation among states will make a significant difference to our ability to deal with disasters.

At the same time, the complexity of disaster and humanitarian relief operations requires close co-ordination among different agencies - the military, civil relief agencies and non-governmental organisations. In particular, co-ordination between military and civilian agencies in disaster and humanitarian relief is crucial to ensure smooth, timely and effective co-ordination of relief efforts.

The SAF's Contributions

The armed forces play an important role in a co-ordinated response to humanitarian and disaster relief contingencies, especially in large-scale and acute disasters, as they are disciplined, operationally ready and can contribute valuable assets.

Singapore is fortunate to be free of natural disasters. Nevertheless, the SAF has been called upon to assist in humanitarian and disaster relief efforts in other parts of the world. The SAF believes that increasingly, in a globalised world, armed forces have the responsibility not only to defend national sovereignty but also to contribute to regional and international security. The SAF also recognises that many threats today do not take the form of conventional military threats, and that the armed forces should be prepared to work with other agencies to foster a multi-dimensional response to contingencies that have an impact on human security. In this regard, the SAF has actively participated in disaster and humanitarian relief missions - not only to countries in Southeast Asia but also as far away as Turkey.

Military medicine is another area where the SAF has contributed its expertise to humanitarian relief. The SAF often sends medical teams to provide medical assistance to the victims in disaster-hit areas. For instance, the SAF contributed a 20-man medical team to assist the earthquake victims of Bengkulu in June this year. In addition, the SAF has placed its military medical officers for rapid deployment under the UN Disaster Assessment and Co-ordination teams, or UNDAC. UNDAC is a rapid deployment mechanism under the UN Office for Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs designed to provide quick assessment and on-site co-ordination of international relief whenever a disaster occurs.

But disaster preparedness is just as important as disaster relief. Training is a key aspect of enhancing the region's capability to respond to disaster and humanitarian contingencies. The SAF is keen to exchange views and share its experience on military medicine with regional countries. For instance, in May this year, the SAF hosted the 10th Asia-Pacific Military Medicine Conference, which brought together more than 400 participants from 28 countries to discuss the challenges and threats faced by military medicine professionals. The SAF believes that regional multilateral military co-operation will enhance the inter-operability among regional armed forces and contribute to the region's overall capability to deal with contingencies for the benefit of everyone.

CHART Course

Singapore is pleased to co-host this CHART course with the United States under the auspices of the ARF, as another avenue through which to bring about greater co-operation and mutual understanding among member countries. Humanitarian relief is an area where there could be concrete ARF co-operation, as there is general consensus and willingness among member countries to co-operate in this area.

The ARF, which brings together 23 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, provides a good platform for region-wide multilateral co-operation in humanitarian relief. The ARF also provides a good platform for fostering a multi-dimensional, multi-agency response to humanitarian and disaster relief needs as it brings together the expertise of both civilian as well as military establishments.

Singapore is happy to work with the United States on this CHART course. The aim of the course is to train disaster managers from both defence and civilian agencies involved in humanitarian and emergency response operations to function in a multi-agency environment in co-ordination with relief organisations. We hope that the course will contribute to the enhancement of the national capability of ARF countries in humanitarian relief as well as foster closer regional co-operation and exchange of expertise in humanitarian relief.

On its part, the SAF also hopes that this course will serve as a means of allowing ARF defence and military officials to contribute their expertise to the ARF process in a concrete way. The SAF believes that military establishments have a concrete contribution to make in many areas of the ARF's work, such as disaster relief and search and rescue. The involvement of defence establishments will further confidence-building in the ARF and contribute to the operationalisation of the ARF's CBMs in these areas. We hope that this course can serve as a start to more opportunities in the future whereby defence officials can play an active role in promoting co-operation within the ARF.

Conclusion

On this note, I wish all the participants a fruitful time at this ARF CHART Course. I also wish the SAF Medical Corps and the US Centre of Excellence every success in holding this course.

Thank you.

News Release:

- Opening Ceremony of the Asean Regional Forum Combined Humanitarian Assistance Response Training Course (MINDEF_20000821001)

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