

Thailand to Help Develop the ASEAN Regional Forum into a Premier Regional Security Institution (12/9/2008)

During Thailand's chairmanship of ASEAN, from July 2008 to December 2009, the country aims to develop the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) into a mechanism that can effectively respond to many challenges in the region.

In his remarks at the ARF Workshop on Stabilization and Reconstruction Issues, the Deputy Permanent Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Norachit Sinhaseni, spoke of the ARF contribution to peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region. Co-organized and co-chaired by Thailand and the United States, the workshop took place in Bangkok on September 11.

The inaugural meeting of ARF was held in Bangkok in July 1994. The objectives were to foster constructive dialogue and consultation on political and security issues of common interest and concern and to make significant contributions to efforts towards confidence-building and preventive diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region. The current participants in ARF consist of 26 countries. Apart from Thailand and the United States, they also include Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Canada, China, the European Union, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, Singapore, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam.

Mr. Norachit said that, from its birth in Bangkok 15 years ago, ARF has evolved into an important forum and has helped promote greater trust and confidence among participants through its many activities. He pointed out that in many cases, the end of conflicts could create vulnerable situations for a country. If there were no effective stabilization and reconstruction measures that could help the country maintain stability, conflicts might recur. Similarly, in a post-natural disaster situation, if there were no effective stabilization and reconstruction measures, new problems could emerge.

Mr. Norachit gave a brief summary of Thailand's experiences in United Nations and international peacekeeping operations. In the 1990s, Thailand sent two battalions of engineers as well as medical and mine clearing teams to Cambodia to help in the reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts. Later, it participated in peacekeeping operations in East Timor (Timor-Leste), Afghanistan, Iraq, Sierra Leone, and Burundi.

In response to natural disasters, Thai military and civilian personnel have been dispatched to provide necessary assistance to countries affected by natural disasters, such as the earthquakes in Iran in 2003, the Boxing Day tsunami in 2004, and most recently the cyclone Nargis in Myanmar. In cyclone Nargis case, the Thai military airlift of humanitarian supplies was the first to arrive in Yangon, within three days of the disaster.

Thailand established a Peace Operations Center under the Royal Thai Armed Forces Headquarters in 2006 to provide personnel training and prepare technical support for peace operations. The center has so far trained more than 1,000 troops in preparation for participation in future UN peacekeeping operations.