

CONFERENCE ON SPACE LAW AND SPACE APPLICATIONS
FOR DISASTER MANAGEMENT IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION
Chiangmai, Thailand, 20-22 November 2007

Opening Address

**President Dr. Arthit Urairat
Rector Magnificus, Rangsit University**

Excellencies,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of Rangsit University, one of the host institutions that help organize this historic Conference on Space Law and the Peaceful Uses of Space for Disaster Management in Asia and the Pacific Region in this hospitable land of a thousand smiles, I have the greatest honour and pleasure to express my deepest gratitude to Chiangmai University and the International Institute of Space Law (IISL) for their willing cooperation and spontaneous agreement to co-host this significant event together with Rangsit University in this historic capital city of the Northern Region and the Land of the Free. The host institutions are profoundly grateful for the collective support so generously given by McGill Institute of Air and Space Law in Montreal, Canada, by the National Center for Remote Sensing, Air and Space Law in Mississippi, USA, and last but not least, by Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA).

In the first place, I beg to underline the importance that Thailand attaches to the organization of this Conference by acknowledging with distinct honour and profound gratitude the presence and presidency of the

Opening Session of the 2006 Conference under the Royal Patronage of Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand, whose records of total and complete dedications to the love of science and technology for the peaceful uses of space and outer space for the common benefit of mankind are indeed unsurpassed. Each and every participant in this historic event can still feel the warmth of the gracious leadership and guidance of Her Royal Highness, for which I beg to register a debt of timeless and immemorial appreciation.

For all the participants, natives of Thailand and invited guests, I greet you with all my sincerity and bid you a heartiest welcome to this hospitable land that could embrace you with all its charms and enchantments.

In the course of our debate it is expected that several national reports will be heard on the occurrences of natural disasters in various parts of Asia and the Pacific Region, and that distinguished participants will be duly apprised of the devastating effect of the natural catastrophe, and more importantly that the Asian Pacific Region has learned from past experience to be better able to defend itself by finding shelter and food in

circumstances of extreme emergencies. The status of preparedness will be reported from several national entities as well as from the international agencies, global and regional, governmental and non-governmental. The principles of friendly relations and cooperation among nations under the Charter of the United Nations will be tested and we all stand to learn and gain from the studies of these various national and international reports, especially the recent Report of the Secretary General of the United Nations of 21 May 2007, entitled, Strengthening Emergency Relief, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, Recovery and Prevention of the Aftermath of the Indian Ocean Tsunami Disaster. A series of General Assembly Resolutions need to be studied with their fullest implications considered.

While developing nations have a long way to go in the direction of self study and self preparation, no developed country appears to have passed the threshold of perfection. Not so long ago, Japan had to face an unprecedented earthquake of unusual magnitude with the result that the Mayor of Kobe found himself at a loss to accept friendly foreign humanitarian assistance. In a more recent devastation of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Louisiana, for instance, the United States appeared less than fully prepared, hesitant whether or not to accept the offer of nurses from Cuba for humanitarian assistance. On the other hand, it is comforting to learn from a United Nations press release regarding effective response to Cyclone Sidr in Bangladesh, where the UN World Food Programme (WFP) announced on 16 November the distribution of enough high-energy biscuits, considered vital in the early

days of an emergency when cooking was impossible, to feed 400,000 people in the affected area over the ensuing three days. The Cyclone has been tracked while approaching the country and 3.2 million people were evacuated. The death tolls have been dramatically reduced from comparable events in 1970 which killed between 300,000 and 400,000 people, while another in 1991 took the lives of 130,000 to 140,000. The recent death toll in Bangladesh is as yet unreported, but it looks nothing like as big as those in 1970 or even 1991. The current state of preparedness did contribute to saving lives when the cyclone hit. These are merely a few samples of the kind of reports likely to be submitted, studied and discussed in the course of our deliberation in the two days ahead.

Suffice it for me to say at this point before closing this opening address that I wish finally to express my fondest hope and expectation that under the prevailing auspices this Conference will ultimately be brought to a delightful and fruitful conclusion.

Chiangmai, 21 November 2007