



ASIA-PACIFIC TELECOMMUNITY

**6th APT Workshop on Disaster Management/Communications (WDMC-6)
7-9 July 2013, Nadi, Fiji**

WELCOME ADDRESS

By Ms. Areewan Haorangsi, Secretary General, APT

Mr. Shivnesh Prasad, Representative of Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Attorney-General and Minister for Communications, Fiji,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning.

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the 6th APT Workshop on Disaster Management/ Communications (WDMC-6) here in Nadi, Fiji..

First of all, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Ministry of Communications, Fiji, for accepting to host this Workshop.

I would also like to thank the Department of Communications, Australian Government, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, Government of Japan, for their financial support for this Workshop.

Distinguished Delegates,

I would like to refer to the Asia-Pacific ICT Ministerial Meeting in Brunei Darussalam last September that the importance of disaster management and communications for the Asia-Pacific was reaffirmed. Disaster management was identified as one of the six key priorities for the region.

This comes as no surprise given that the Asia-Pacific region is the most naturally disaster prone region in the world. The UNESCAP's Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific for 2014 reported that between 2004 and 2013, 41.2 per cent of the world's natural disasters occurred in the Asia-Pacific region. Such period also saw a three-fold increase in this region in the number of deaths from natural disasters, compared with those from 1994 to 2003.

The subject matter of this Workshop is something that deeply affects everyone in the region and we could see mention of a disaster of one form or another every week in newspapers and on TV news.

This year, already two of APT Members have suffered the devastating effects of natural disaster.

In March, severe Tropical Cyclone Pam regarded as the most intense tropical cyclone in the southern hemisphere in 2015 struck Vanuatu, destroying up to 90 percent of all buildings. Around 75,000 people were left in need of emergency shelter, and 96 per cent of food crops were destroyed.

In the following month, Nepal suffered a 7.8 magnitude earthquake that killed more than 8,800 people and injured over 23,000. Entire villages were flattened and world-heritage buildings were destroyed. Intensive recovery efforts will continue in Nepal for some time to come.

For the case of Vanuatu, remarkably, according to reporter, there were not huge number confirmed fatalities. Many development experts agree it was due to a combination of traditional knowledge, improved communications technology and disaster preparedness.

Ladies and Gentlemen

We are fortunate today to have a number of international experts who worked on the recovery efforts in Vanuatu and Nepal here with us to share their experiences. Their input will provide an invaluable source of information for the Workshop and our mutual efforts to improve disaster preparedness and the capacity of the Asia-Pacific region to respond swiftly and effectively to disaster.

It is clear that before, during, and after a natural disaster or emergency, swift and reliable communications are essential. Modern technology can provide the vital links on which humanitarian teams rely to save people's lives and property. Our task at this Workshop is to look at how we can best achieve this.

In the pre-disaster phase, warning systems can save lives if critical information is disseminated to the people in need in a fast and effective manner. During the disaster, the general public needs to be told what to do and be provided with critical information. The restoration exercise following a disaster is also where the public require a constant flow of information on all aspects of the disaster.

New technology allows new ways of communicating this information, but having said that, some traditional methods are still very effective and cannot be discounted. Disaster Management agencies need to be aware of all the options open to them and how to put them to the most effective use.

I would like to highlight that in the afternoon of the second day of this Workshop, there will be simulation exercise on the "First 24-hour after a Major Disaster" and Group Work from the Simulation Exercise. I hope that you will enjoy this new activity.

During the final session of the Workshop, just like in previous workshop, we would like to have your views on the path forward by the APT relating to Disaster Management/ Communications. It is important for the APT's consideration to implement further disaster management activities, especially for developing countries. Your contributions for this final session are greatly appreciated.

Before I conclude, allow me once again to gratefully appreciate the Ministry of Communications, Fiji for hosting this important Workshop and other arrangements.

For those coming from other countries, I hope that you could find some time to enjoy Fiji and contribute to the economy of the host by doing some shopping.

I wish you all a successful Workshop and enjoy your stay in Fiji.

Thank you very much.
