**19th South East Asian Leaders meeting**

Thursday, 6th October 2022, Welcome address (5 mins at Opening Ceremony)

Pre-recorded **message from IFRC President Francesco Rocca**

Honourable Minister of Health,

President of Brunei Darussalam Red Crescent Society,

Esteemed Leaders of Southeast Asia National Societies

Dear Colleagues of the ICRC and IFRC,

It is a pleasure and great honour for me to address you at the opening of this 19th annual South-East Asian Leadership meeting. Last year this time we joined together remotely in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is wonderful to see meetings in person resuming. It was very nice to meet so many you during the Statutory Meetings in Geneva a few months ago.

Please allow me to start with thanking the Government of Brunei Darussalam, represented here today by Honourable Minister of Health. I would also like to thank and congratulate the President of the Brunei Darussalam Red Crescent Society for hosting the South-East Asia leaders meeting for the first time.

I also much welcome the invitation that you extended to your youth, and I am very glad to hear that there are youth representative from 11 South-East Asian countries present at this meeting. I see this as a sign of your strong commitment to ensure that the youth voice is heard!

As you all know, Youth engagement is very important to me: involving youth is not only an investment in the future, but also an investment in today, as young people make up a large part of our population. Who is better placed than young people to understand and acknowledge their needs and also to be innovative and ready to adapt and change? Youth are critical for us to be relevant as the Red Cross and Red Crescent family in future. I would like to warmly greet all youth members and encourage you to make your voice heard in this meeting, and beyond.

I would like to - again - applaud the work of all your National Societies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Your volunteers and staff, who stood at the frontline in responding to this crisis, did an amazing work for humanity and their efforts did not go unnoticed. The pandemic highlighted the unique and crucial role of our Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies as auxiliaries to their governments in providing life-saving services. It is now time to seize momentum and ensure that we continue to be the organisation of choice when it comes to answering to the humanitarian needs at local and national level. We must also remember that the effects of this pandemic is not yet over and we must invest in the important work to accompany people to recover physically, mentally and economically.

Our Statutory Meetings earlier this year were an important milestone at many fronts. We discussed contemporary challenges, and we adapted our tools to better respond to the crises. We also elected a new IFRC governing board, that for the first time has a gender balanced representation. I take this opportunity to thank you all for the trust that was given to me upon my re-election. I would also like to congratulate Her Highness Tunku Puteri, Malaysian Red Crescent Chairperson, upon her election to the Governing Board. Through her, your subregion will be well represented in the IFRC’s governance.

We will continue to raise the importance of Gender and Diversity, and as the Governing Board we have decided to continue our support to advance and support women leaders as one of our priorities. The next challenge will be to promote gender balance in the leadership of National Societies, and it is a challenge that i leave in your hands: please ensure that you organisations meets the goals on diversity and gender balance that we have committed to at our statutory meetings in 2017 and 2019.

In June we also took many important decisions on policies and resolutions that we now need to implement. The adoption of the Seville Agreement 2.0, which amongst other puts National Societies in the driving seat in responding to crises and disasters.

The climate crisis was also prominently discussed in June. We must continue to strengthen our activities to face the humanitarian effects of climate change, working on anticipation and adaptation, and increasing climate resilience - particularly in a region like Southeast Asia that is highly disaster prone. I would like to encourage all National Societies that have not yet signed the Climate and Environmental Charter to do so, and also use this opportunity to set your own targets on what your role and contribution will be to alleviate the burden of the climate crisis.

In your region, you face the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Myanmar. I would like to thank the Myanmar Red Cross for their active efforts to address the crises and for the principled role of the Myanmar Red Cross. I also hope that you, as neighbour National Societies, understand and appreciate how you can support each other in the region when crises and disasters occur. I believe that only when we work together can we be stronger.

In ending, I would like to wish Brunei Darussalam Red Crescent Society, as the host of this meeting, and all leaders of the South-East Asia region, a productive and fruitful meeting. I look forward to hearing more about your meeting and your priorities at the upcoming Asia Pacific Conference to take place in 2023.

Thank you!