FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**Over 310 academics, practitioners and professionals attend international conference on building resilience in Bangkok, Thailand**

**Experts focus on the need to bridge the gap between science, policy and communities in disaster risk reduction**

***Bangkok, Thailand*** – Over 300 International and Thai academics, practitioners, professionals and policymakers joined in the *7th International Conference on Building Resilience,* for a three-day event that concluded on Wednesday (29th November).

In her opening address to the Conference, Co-Conference Chair, Professor Dilanthi Amaratunga, from the Global Disaster Resilience Centre at the University of Huddersfield in the UK, recalled the devastating impact of the 2004 Tsunami, which devastated many communities across the region, including Thailand. In responding to hazards of this magnitude, Professor Amaratunga called for, “all countries to act in a new spirit of partnership to build a safer world based on common interests and shared responsibility.”

She added that, “Regional and international research will significantly enhance countries’ ability to achieve real progress, in mitigating disasters through the transfer of technology and the sharing of information.”

The conference sought to bridge the gap between the research community in disaster risk reduction, and policy and practice. Experts from all geographical regions shared state of the art research being conducted by Universities and research institutes, much of it being undertaken in response to the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR), which defines the global course of action over the next 15 years.

At the opening of the conference, Dr Peeranan Towashiraporn, Director at the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC), challenged the scientific community to bridge the gap between Science and Policies for Disaster Risk Management and Resilient Development. He offered examples from Asia and the Pacific, emphasising that a lot of scientific information is not being applied at the local level due to lack of understanding.

Across the three-day programme, which included the presentation of over 160 scientific papers, five key note addresses, and a series of panel discussions and side events, several recommendations to bridge the gap emerged.

These included a need for researchers and practitioners to engage the community, including stakeholders, as equal partners in the initiation of research programmes and community‐based interventions. This approach would contrast with many existing research programmes, which often focus on communicating the results to key actors at the end of the study.

The importance of skill development across all actors was also highlighted. Universities should make it a priority that the next generation of researchers and practitioners acquire real experience in community‐based programs. Similarly, existing practitioners should receive quality training and opportunities for skills development to enhance their ability to apply scientific evidence and community knowledge at every stage of intervention development, adaptation, implementation and evaluation.

The conference provided a platform for capacity building of higher education institutes across Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Young researchers and academic staff from across eight Universities in Asia were supported to attend and contribute to the event as part of the ASCENT initiative.

Co-funded by an EU Erasmus+ programme grant, ASCENT is being led by the University of Huddersfield’s Global Disaster Resilience Centre, based in the UK, and supported by other Universities in Sweden, Estonia and Lithuania, and associated partners such as the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC).

The project is developing the skills and knowledge of academics in Asia to better equip them to support their own national and regional resilience building efforts. Capacity building at the conference focused on increasing international collaboration, and increasing the linkages between Universities and government, business and local communities. There was also a doctoral school, working with current PhD researchers to enhance their skills.

Other proposals to bridge the science and policy-practice gap included scientific journal editors to encourage a focus on implementation methods in scientific articles that deal with community interventions, and research funders requiring and supporting the long-term evaluation of research impact.

The need to focus on health also emerged as a strong theme within the conference. Health resilience is strongly promoted throughout the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, including the substantial reduction of disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries.

In her keynote address, Professor Virginia Murray from Public Health England stressed that, “health sciences should be more involved in the disaster risk management community, advancing their understanding of outbreaks and pandemics, health impacts of all hazards, but also advances in data collection.”

Professor Murray also emphased the need for alignment of such efforts, including to, “Ensure coherence of national, regional and global DRR frameworks and those related to emergency and disaster risk management for health such as the International Health Regulations (2005) and the Global Health Security Agenda.”

Other keynote addresses illustrated the diversity of challenges being addressed in order to increase resilience to disasters. Professor Sujeeva Setunge from RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia discussed the need to strengthen and retrofit critical aging infrastructure. Professor Mo Hamza, from Lund University, Sweden, addressed the complexities involved in understanding environmentally induced migration, while Dr Harkunti Rahayu, from the Institute of Technology Bandung, Indonesia.

This 2017 event was the seventh in a series of conferences aimed at increasing societal resilience to disasters. Previous conferences were held in Sri Lanka, the UK, Australia and New Zealand. This year’s event is being jointly organised by Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC), Thailand; Global Disaster Resilience Centre, University of Huddersfield, UK; Naresuan University, Thailand; and Chiang Mai University, Thailand.

175 scientific articles from the conference will shortly be published in an issue of Procedia Engineering, published by Elsevier. In contrast to many scientific articles, these will be freely available and accessible on the Elsevier website, in the hope of widening their reach to many developing countries, as well as policy makers and practitioners, who often do not have access to expensive subscription based academic journals.

Next year, the Building Resilience conference will move back to Europe, to be held in the historic city of Lisbon, Portugal.

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**Note to editors**

1. *We cordially invite representatives of the media to cover the 7th International Conference on Building Resilience: using scientific knowledge to inform policy and practice in disaster risk reduction' which will be held at Swisshotel Concorde, Bangkok, Thailand, 27th - 29th November 2017. The conference is jointly organised by the Global Disaster Resilience Centre at the University of Huddersfield in the United Kingdom, and Chiang Mai University, Naresuan University and the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center in Thailand*
2. *Over 300 International and Thai academics, practitioners, professionals and policymakers will share 200 state of the art research papers*
3. *The list of the keynote speakers is attached*

Further details on the conference can be found at [www.buildresilience.org](http://www.buildresilience.org).