UNESCO launches project to develop a flood risk mitigation plan for Ayutthaya World Heritage Site

Bangkok, 22 March 2013 – UNESCO is launching a project to develop a flood risk mitigation plan for the World Heritage Site of Ayutthaya.

The launch event at UNESCO Bangkok on 22 March 2013 was attended by key players of Thailand’s national flood risk reduction efforts and representatives from the embassies of Germany, Japan, Portugal and the United States that have been actively involved in Ayutthaya’s post-flood recovery in 2011 and 2012.

The project was developed following the floods of 2011 that heavily affected the Ayutthaya Historic City World Heritage Site. The project is funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) under its water financing programme.

“Disaster risk mitigation is one of the top priorities for World Heritage protection identified by the World Heritage Committee,” said Gwang-Jo Kim, Director of UNESCO Bangkok.

Since October 2011, the Thai authorities have undertaken extensive repair work at the World Heritage site and have invested in water management systems for the Chao Phraya River basin. However, up to now, there has not been any long-term effort to protect Ayutthaya’s heritage assets from future flooding.

This two-year project will assess the flood risks at the Ayutthaya World Heritage site and then develop a flood risk mitigation plan.

Experts will undertake hydraulic modeling using computer simulations for flood risks at the site. Then, based on the results, project partners will develop a flood risk mitigation plan together with local stakeholders. International expertise in risk preparedness for cultural heritage conservation will be mobilized by UNESCO Bangkok in order to guide the development of the flood risk mitigation plan in line with international conservation standards.

Mr. Kim said that upon successful completion of this project, “Ayutthaya will be the first World Heritage site in Southeast Asia with a management plan for flood risk mitigation, setting an example for other World Heritage sites around the region.”

The project will be undertaken by the UNESCO Institute for Water Education (UNESCO-IHE) based in the Netherlands, in close collaboration with UNESCO Bangkok. Project partners include the Hydro and Agro Informatics Institute (HAII), the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) and the Fine Arts Department of Thailand.

An international expert seminar to commence the consultation sessions for the development of the flood risk mitigation plan is planned for October 2013.

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