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PRESS RELEASE

Thailand and U.S. to Deploy First “DART” Tsunami Buoy in Indian Ocean

PHUKET, THAILAND Today, senior officials presided over a ceremony in Phuket to commemorate the launch of the first U.S.-built Deep-ocean Assessment and Reporting of Tsunamis (“DART”) II tsunami detection system for the Indian Ocean. They included U.S. Ambassador Ralph L. Boyce; Mr. Nitya Pibulsonggram, Minister of Foreign Affairs; Richard Whelden, Acting Director of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Regional Development Mission for Asia; Dr. Plodprasop Suraswadi, Executive Director of the Thai National Disaster Warning Center (NDWC); Dr. Smith Dharmasaroja, Chairman of the National Disaster Warning Administration; Mr. Nirand Kalayanamitr, Governor of Phuket; and others from Thailand, the U.S., Indian Ocean governments, and international organizations.

This DART II system, valued at US\$440,000 not including shipping and deployment costs, is being deployed through a partnership between the United States and the Royal Thai Governments as a contribution to the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System (IOTWS). This partnership demonstrates the Thai Government’s high level of commitment to develop the regional tsunami warning system. USAID manages the U.S. IOTWS Program that supports regional and national tsunami and multi-hazard warning systems for the Indian Ocean, which includes this buoy deployment.

Ambassador Boyce remarked, “Once the buoy is deployed, real-time tsunami detection data will be freely shared on international telecommunications networks for all countries to receive. Continued success will require a long-term commitment by the Government of Thailand, and ongoing cooperation not only with the United States, but with the other Indian Ocean countries all supporting the regional system of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission. This one buoy today is the first, but eventually will be one of many buoys once the complete array is deployed with contributions from Indonesia, India, Malaysia, and Australia.”

Today’s deployment caps a series of discussions and negotiations that began earlier this year between U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement early last month to prepare for the deployment and to solidify plans for long-term operations and maintenance. The DART II system is part of the array of 24 deep-ocean buoys planned by UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, which oversees the development of the regional tsunami warning system. NOAA will provide technical assistance during deployment and initial operation, and the Thai Meteorological Department and NDWC share responsibility for the deployment and long-term buoy operation and maintenance. NOAA also plans to launch a second DART buoy in 2007 in partnership with the Government of Indonesia off the coast of

Sumatra. Last week in Jakarta, President Bush announced that the U.S. and Indonesia would seek to deploy an additional buoy off the coast of Java.

While 20 DART buoys are now deployed and operating across the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, this is the first operational buoy to be launched in the Indian Ocean that will report deep-ocean observational data directly to the World Meteorological Organization's Global Telecommunications System (GTS) for early warning. Once operational, the buoy will provide continuous real-time data for any country to use, including the Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Hawaii that currently provides tsunami alerts for the Indian Ocean, and future regional warning centers in the region. The DART will use highly-sensitive water pressure sensors on the ocean floor to indicate whether tsunami waves are generated after large undersea earthquakes, and send data via satellite to scientists approximately three minutes after an earthquake, thereby improving greatly the capacity to forecast tsunamis and save lives along coastal areas.

Following the launch, Thai and U.S. scientists and engineers departed Cape Panwa Pier aboard the MV SEAFDEC for the two-day journey to the deployment site at 9° North and 89° East, about mid-way between Thailand and Sri Lanka. After deploying the station there, they will test its communications system and continue monitoring its signals to ensure successful and sustained data transmission.

The U.S. IOTWS Program builds capacity to address tsunamis and other coastal hazards through targeted technology transfer, training, and technical support. Regionally, it increases capacity to detect, analyze, and report earthquake and tsunami hazards, including sea-level detection systems like the DART II station. Country-level activities focus on formulating and disseminating warnings, ensuring that warnings reach communities at risk, and strengthening community resilience and disaster preparedness. More information on the U.S. IOTWS Program is located at www.us-iotws.gov.

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