

**ASEAN EMERGENCY RAPID ASSESSMENT TEAM MISSION REPORT
9 – 18 May 2008**

“Cyclone Nargis, Myanmar”

I. Current Situation

1. Since the first reports of the extent of the devastation of Cyclone Nargis, the Government of Myanmar has responded by organising aid for the survivors of the disaster. This aid has attempted to ease the suffering and provide basic emergency sustenance and other critical support for those people affected by the cyclone. The extent of the disaster both in terms of the extent of its impact and its broad geographical coverage would present an insurmountable challenge for any nation. The current tragic earthquake in China is a stark reminder of how even a country with the depth of resources as China still recognises there are gaps where the international community can assist. The Government of Myanmar acknowledges that there has never been a disaster of this scale before in its nation's history. Yet, it has tried its level best to meet the demands of an adequate and organised response process that is required. However, it would be to the detriment of the survivors of Cyclone Nargis not to utilise all of the available resources from the international humanitarian community, including those from the neighbouring countries and the ASEAN region. In this context, the ASEAN Member States with an established record of cooperation and joint commitment on disaster management issues through the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) and the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management (ACDM) are in an ideal position to provide essential support to the Government of Myanmar to bring much needed assistance to the affected people, working with such partners as the United Nations and donors. To this end, ASEAN can be provided with valuable assistance by Myanmar's neighbouring countries. Consistent with Myanmar's ratification of the AADMER and its active participation in the ACDM, the Government of Myanmar can demonstrate its commitment in harnessing the most experienced disaster management expertise from around the globe as part of an ASEAN-coordinated 'Humanitarian Coalition for the Victims of Cyclone Nargis'¹, in support of the disaster affected people in Myanmar.

II. ASEAN Emergency Rapid Assessment Team Mission in Myanmar

2. In line with the provisions under the AADMER, the ACDM organised, constituted and deployed for the first time its ASEAN Emergency Rapid Assessment Team (ERAT) with representatives from Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and the ASEAN Secretariat. In addition, three members of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) Team from Malaysia, Philippines and Singapore who have been in the field prior to the arrival of the

¹ ERAT suggested changing 'Coalition of Mercy' to 'Humanitarian Coalition for the Victims of Cyclone Nargis' to better portray the objective of the Coalition.

ERAT members, served as resource persons. The key objective of the ASEAN-ERAT mission was to gather and analyse assessment findings through consultations with senior government officials and field assessments in order to provide recommendations on the way forward in addressing the support for the Government of Myanmar. The ASEAN-ERAT members have begun to operate in Yangon since 9 May 2008 and the mission lasted until 18 May 2008. It should be noted that assessments would have been more reflective of the realities on the ground had the team been permitted to conduct assessments in disaster-affected areas that ASEAN-ERAT selected.

III. Key Findings of ASEAN-ERAT

Access

3. The main overarching concern for the international community including other ASEAN Member States and international organisations is currently the issue of access to the affected areas for the provision of assistance. International aid workers with known expertise and experience in managing and providing assistance in major catastrophes need to be working closely with their government counterparts in the capital and more importantly in the field where the need for assistance and coordination is critical. There is the possibility of a potential second wave of deaths and morbidity due to diseases and nutritional deficiency which could be avoided through a more coordinated effort between the international community and the Government of Myanmar.

Logistics

4. The Government of Myanmar has allowed international aid flights into the country bringing much needed relief items. The ASEAN-ERAT observed that maintaining an efficient logistics pipeline in the affected areas particularly the Ayeyarwady delta is highly challenging and requires specialised equipment and personnel to be effective. This can be afforded by the deployment of experts and assets from the international community to augment national capacity. A clear logistics pipeline and the effective distribution of aid items will significantly enhance the accountability of the government. This can be achieved by the active participation of the international community alongside their relevant government counterparts.

Shelters

5. The ASEAN-ERAT observed that shelters and resettlement for the affected population is one of the many priority needs as many people are living in cramped tents and temporary shelters with inadequate sanitation facilities. The coming of the heavy monsoon rain in the next two weeks adds to the dire consequences that may arise due to overcrowding, lack of hygiene and the potential spread of diseases. The international community has a track record of being able to support the provision and rapid establishment of temporary shelters and should therefore be allowed to be mobilised. Building materials for example roofing sheets should be made available immediately.

Water

6. Water concerns are paramount. Reports have suggested that large numbers of people do not have access to clean drinking water and adequate sanitation. Water purification systems need to be made available to temporary settlements as a matter of urgency. The need for high volume water purification systems is urgent as well as the expertise to set these up and train national staff to manage and maintain this equipment. Once safe potable water is available, the risks of diseases and their consequences will be significantly reduced. The international community is ready and available to provide these resources in terms of equipment and expertise. A mechanism for the international community to work with the Government of Myanmar to provide these resources should be established as a matter of urgency.

Health

7. There have already been reports of diarrhoeal diseases in the affected population. In addition, stagnant water due to flooding increases the risks of malaria and dengue haemorrhagic fever. There is a need for ongoing and continuous health surveillance and vigilance. There are reports that many of the survivors in the remote areas of the delta still do not have adequate access to health care. As such, greater access by health personnel from the international community can be life-saving. Added to this, WHO estimates that at least 60% of health infrastructures in the delta have been either destroyed or damaged. This requires urgent attention and support from the international community to the Government of Myanmar.

Food Security

8. As the monsoon draws closer, the need to plant rice in the Ayeyarwady delta is critical. The Agriculture Ministry has undertaken a thorough evaluation and determined that replanting needs to be carried out within the next three weeks. In order to do this, rapid mobilisation of funds, equipment and saline resistant seeds and the urgent resettlement of farmers will help ensure that there will be a harvest. Failure to do this will compromise future food security thereby resulting in the need for food aid.

Education

9. The return of children to school is a crucial factor post-disaster and vital to the psychological health and uninterrupted educational needs of the affected population. Existing data from the Ministry of Education reveals that 75% of schools have been destroyed or damaged in the affected areas. The school term is scheduled to resume on 1 June 2008. The strategic plan of the Education Working Group in the country highlights that temporary schools should be established in the immediate future before longer term construction can begin. Emergency "School-in-a-box" kits and temporary schools are readily available from the international community and need to be distributed immediately.

III. Humanitarian Coalition for the Victims of Cyclone Nargis

10. While the Government of Myanmar remains primarily responsible for the wellbeing of its people, the proposal for the creation of the 'Humanitarian Coalition

for the Victims of Cyclone Nargis' was initiated by the Secretary-General of ASEAN to assist the Government of Myanmar in its response to Cyclone Nargis. It is proposed that ASEAN be at the forefront of the Coalition to forge strong partnerships with neighbouring countries as well as organisations that have expertise and experience in managing major disasters, through all phases of relief, recovery, rehabilitation and risk reduction. The ASEAN Secretariat has already received the support from the OCHA and the World Bank, and should expand this to include other competent international and regional organisations, including non-governmental organisations.

11. This Coalition and its partners aim to assist and support the Government of Myanmar with immediate, medium and long-term activities in response to Cyclone Nargis. The Coalition should work closely in all the different sectors covering food, nutrition, health, shelter, water and sanitation, logistics, education, early recovery, agriculture and protection, in line with the already well-established cluster system of the United Nations, to ensure timely and adequate assistance is delivered. With this approach, ASEAN is confident that needs and gaps can be more readily addressed.

IV. Recommendations

12. The ASEAN-ERAT strongly recommends the following affirmative actions:

- i. A 'Humanitarian Coalition for the Victims of Cyclone Nargis' is established immediately to coordinate and facilitate the ongoing relief, recovery and future reconstruction efforts. This should include ASEAN (including the Government of Myanmar), neighbouring countries to Myanmar, the United Nations and other international organisations beyond the region.
- ii. The 'Humanitarian Coalition for the Victims of Cyclone Nargis' acts as a coordinating platform for relief and recovery strategies and be expanded to involve key partners who will enhance coordination and information sharing.
- iii. The 'Humanitarian Coalition for the Victims of Cyclone Nargis' establishes a mechanism in partnership with the Government of Myanmar for access of coalition partners to implement urgent relief and recovery programmes in cyclone affected areas.
- iv. The implementation of the 'Humanitarian Coalition for the Victims of Cyclone Nargis' should commence with the establishment of a task force comprising representatives from the Government of Myanmar, ASEAN Secretariat, UNOCHA and key international organisations.
- v. Experienced assessment teams in partnership with the Government of Myanmar will complete further detailed assessments and analyses of the current situation in the entire affected area.
- vi. The 'Humanitarian Coalition for the Victims of Cyclone Nargis' along with the Government of Myanmar will develop a plan of action and subsequent activities to meet its goals in line with assessments from the field, with a focus on priority needs.

- vii. Disaster risk reduction strategies are incorporated in planning to ensure a policy of 'build back better' is employed in relation to schools, hospitals, other public buildings and housing.
- viii. The capacity of the Government and people of Myanmar be enhanced through this partnership and through inclusion and training in well-established mechanisms such as the ACDM, UNDAC, International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) and the Environmental Emergencies Network.

V. Proposed Actions

13. In short, recognising the important and daunting task faced by the Government of Myanmar, ASEAN Member States can play a crucial role, based on their long and trusted working relationship with the Government of Myanmar, to ensure the immediate and longer term needs of the survivors of Cyclone Nargis are met. The wealth and expertise available in neighbouring countries in the South East Asian region and beyond are ready and waiting to be fully utilised.

14. The Foreign Ministers of ASEAN may wish to strongly endorse and support the immediate implementation of the above recommendations and realise the 'Humanitarian Coalition for the Victims of Cyclone Nargis' with immediate effect.

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