



ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
SECRETARY-GENERAL

**Message of the Secretary-General of ASEAN
for the World Humanitarian Day (WHD), 19 August 2012**

Today, 19 August 2012, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) stands in solidarity with the rest of humankind in celebrating the World Humanitarian Day. The people of ASEAN share in honoring the women and men who have devoted their energy, committed their time, and on many occasions sacrificed their safety and their very lives in order to help others in need.

Beyond their devotion, humanitarians are faced with daunting challenges and complex human tragedy. Human suffering steadily increases as typhoons, earthquakes, and other environmental hazards destroy entire communities and claim lives. Whole populations continue to be displaced and threatened as a result of human conflicts.

The ASEAN region is increasingly vulnerable to such threats, with the number and scale of disasters increasing both in frequency and severity. Just a couple of weeks ago the Philippines had just been drenched by relentless rains from the southwest monsoon, flooding entire cities and towns in Central Luzon and Metro Manila. ASEAN is also not spared from the ravages of human conflict, resulting into thousands of displacements across the region.

In the face of such challenges, ASEAN believes in the humanitarian imperative. Indeed we should all embrace the spirit of helping, not only as a matter of policy but also as normal practice and our guiding ethos. No less than our ASEAN Charter declares that we are inspired by "one caring and sharing community", "promoting a "people-oriented ASEAN" and "upholding international humanitarian law."

We have also been proactive in fostering regional cooperation and building capacity to deal with various kinds of natural and human-induced disasters. In December 2009, the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) entered into force. We went two steps further: first by producing a Work Programme in 2010 as a set of actionable steps for the realisation of the regional treaty, and second by establishing the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance (AHA Centre) in 2011 as the operational engine of AADMER.

One Vision, One Identity, One Community

ASEAN's capacity for humanitarian response has actually been tested at the height of Cyclone Nargis, which struck Myanmar in May 2008 and rendered 140,000 loss of lives. ASEAN's lead role in facilitating humanitarian response has contributed valuable lessons for the realisation of AADMER as the region's own framework for humanitarian action. In 2009, the ASEAN Leaders assigned me as the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance Coordinator, for both natural disasters and pandemics, reaffirming ASEAN's priority for humanitarian action.

As these agreements and movements at the top proceed, equally significant things continue to happen on the ground – stories of courage and individual heroism in the middle of unimaginable hardships. In Thailand during the floods last year there was the restaurant owner who donated money and relief goods and set up shelter and mobile kitchen for affected communities. As typhoon Ketsana raged in the Philippines, Muelmar Magallanes, an 18-year-old construction worker, saved 30 people from the rampaging floods before he himself was washed away and killed by the torrent of water.

Such life-affirming stories of people helping each other are replicated in greater magnitudes when institutions cooperate as well. As such we now see governments working hand in hand with civil society groups to ensure that no effort and resources would go to waste. The AADMER itself has been greatly enriched by the support of the AADMER Partnership Group (APG), which is a “banding together” of non-government organisations. As we expect more disasters to happen, we can do no less than to make such symbiosis as the rule, rather than the exception.

On this World Humanitarian Day, I would like to call all ASEAN citizens to join the global effort to commemorate the day and support humanitarian work. We can do this by taking a few simple actions:

1. Visit the www.whd-iwashere.org and register at the website.
2. Support World Humanitarian Day via Twitter, Facebook—or both—and get the word out to friends and followers.
3. Continue tweeting (#WHD2012 #IWASHERE) and posting in the lead-up to 19 August.

Let us make our mark by registering our World Humanitarian Day action.



Dr. Surin Pitsuwan