



TRIPARTITE
CORE
GROUP
(TCG)

**OPENING REMARKS BY H.E DR. SURIN PITSUWAN, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF ASEAN,
AT THE
LAUNCH OF THE POST-NARGIS RECOVERY AND PREPAREDNESS PLAN (PONREPP)**

UNESCAP Building, Bangkok, 9 February 2009

Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are gathered here today to mark yet another important achievement of the ASEAN-led Coordination Mechanism that was established in the aftermath of the devastating Cyclone Nargis which hit the Ayeyarwaddy Delta in May last year. As we launch the Post-Nargis Recovery and Preparedness Plan or PONREPP for short, we can say with much pride and dignity that the ASEAN-led mechanism consisting of the ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force and the Tripartite Core Group has delivered the last and final mandate that the ASEAN Foreign Ministers and the international community had together tasked us to undertake.

As you may recall at the ASEAN-UN Pledging Conference that was held in Yangon on 25 May 2008, the international community in endorsing the ASEAN-led Coordination Mechanism has also asked that three things be done. First, to allow unimpeded access to the affected areas in the Delta for all humanitarian workers; second, to undertake a credible assessment on the immediate and medium to long term needs for relief and recovery; and third, to develop a comprehensive recovery plan for the cyclone affected areas based on the assessment undertaken.

Three major tasks have been assigned to us at the ASEAN-UN Pledging conference. Unimpeded access – to date, close to 3,000 visas have been issued to international humanitarian workers to undertake relief and recovery efforts in the cyclone-affected area. This unimpeded access continues even till today. An important result of this, as shown in the first Periodic Review undertaken recently, is that relief has been able to reach all the affected communities. One has to go to the Delta today and see the many international and national humanitarian workers who have set up their camps and offices, reaching out to the people to help them recover from a traumatic and devastating event.

On the issue of credible assessment – the Post Nargis Joint Assessment or PONJA launched in July 2008 at the sidelines of the 41st ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) in Singapore is a testimony to that success itself. It is a landmark document in many ways. Completed only a few weeks after Nargis struck, it brought together various international and national organisations working together and at the same time ensuring the highest level of integrity to maintain the credibility of the report. What is also important in the case of the PONJA report was that, for the first time, a needs assessment (short term relief and early recovery) and a longer term damage and loss assessment were combined into one comprehensive report. I am told that the success of the PONJA is now being replicated elsewhere, most recently in the case of Haiti after devastating floods hit that country.

A comprehensive recovery plan – PONREPP will be launched today and the details of its content will be revealed to all for you. Essentially, it provides a framework for the recovery of the Delta over the next three years (2009-2011), focusing on 8 key sectors including nutrition, health, livelihoods, disaster risk reduction and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). The PONREPP builds on the Government of Myanmar's own sectoral plans for the Delta and therefore complements the Government's reconstruction plan. It also draws on the previous efforts accomplished, namely, the PONJA report as well as the Periodic Review and the Social Impacts Monitoring Study. More importantly, PONREPP will create a space to raise the international community's commitment and confidence and also to provide an opportunity for ASEAN Member States to continue their commitment and engagement for the benefit of the Cyclone Nargis victims. The PONREPP estimates that close to \$700 million will be required to recover and build back better the lives and assets of the people during the next three years.

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In the annals of history, 9 months do not seem like a long time. Yet in the case of our work in Myanmar since May 2008, so much has been achieved. ASEAN is proud and honoured to have been able to play a leading role in this massive humanitarian effort. Yet we recognise that we could not have done it alone by ourselves. Ours have been a success story of partnership. The TCG, in particular, demonstrates a strong sense of partnership and teamwork involving ASEAN, the Government of Myanmar and the UN system. They have done it through teamwork, facilitating the work and achievements of all the international and national humanitarian communities.

As we now stand ready to move into the recovery phase of Nargis – which undoubtedly will be a longer and more challenging one—we have to continue to strengthen and build on this partnership. ASEAN stands ready to continue to assist in building-back-better the communities in the Delta and ensuring their resilience and preparedness for future disasters. ASEAN will do this through our existing regional mechanisms such as the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) and also through our initiative to build a people-centred, people-oriented ASEAN community. And on this basis, ASEAN is ready to engage ourselves in all other humanitarian challenges because the aim of ASEAN is to build a community of caring society by the year 2015.

The aftermath of Cyclone Nargis has provided a significant opportunity for ASEAN to move closer to a people-centred ASEAN Community as called for in the ASEAN Charter. We have, for the first time, implemented an ASEAN Youth Volunteers Programme and Nargis has provided us with the opportunity, challenged us to draw upon our resources at every step; for the first time, launched and implemented the ASEAN Youth Volunteer programme in the Delta. When I visited one of these projects in Seik Gyi Village, I was touched by the positive impacts that ASEAN had made on close to 2,000 people in this village tract. I am convinced from this experience that such a model can be an important vehicle for bringing ASEAN closer to the people, not only in Myanmar but also in other parts of ASEAN.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

As we move into the recovery phase, there is also a need for us to look at what would be the best mechanism to coordinate and implement the PONREPP. The PONREPP itself implies that the ASEAN-led mechanism shall continue for the next three years of the recovery phase. This will depend on 3 factors. One is the decision on the part of the government of Myanmar – whether this is desirable, whether this is necessary, whether this is something that will help the government of Myanmar in the recovery process of the disaster which was brought by Cyclone Nargis.

Second, we will have to wait for the collective decision of ASEAN Foreign Ministers that mandated us last July to continue our ASEAN-led mechanism until July 2009. In the case of ASEAN, we will need to consolidate our decision, taking into consideration what could be the meaningful role we can play in the recovery phase. Personally, I want our presence to be meaningful and effective, and to be able to open up the space and opportunity for ASEAN's engagement not only in Myanmar; but based on the good experience of Myanmar, we can replicate our engagement in other parts on humanitarian issues. I hope to be able to make preliminary recommendations to the ASEAN Foreign Minister when they meet later this month in Cha Am Hua Hin. But for me to be confident in my recommendation to them, I would need the reassurance to the Government of Myanmar that this is indeed desirable. Just like last time, before we decided on May 19, 2008 in Singapore, and on May 25th at the Yangon International Pledging Conference, the overwhelming support, expression of support, and commitment of support from the international community were essential because as I said, ASEAN cannot do it alone, ASEAN cannot provide all the resources necessary for this long-term or at least medium-term three-year undertaking. So any assurance and reassurance that the international community can express, commit or communicate through Member States of ASEAN certainly will be an important factor in the decision of the Ministers.

In conclusion, I would like to thank all of you who have worked so hard in the development of PONREPP, in particular, my sincere gratitude to Minister Kyaw Thu. I'm glad that you made really clear that we are stuck with you and you are stuck with us, but in this case, this is a welcome "sticking together" and I hope that you will be able to provide us with the leadership, with the confidence and with the accessibility to your highest leadership in Myanmar because one condition that ASEAN made to the highest level of the government of Myanmar before we went in was that a mechanism that would be set up will have to have full access to the highest leadership so as to be able to facilitate all across the board, across the spectrum of the government of Myanmar to bring this task to a fruitful conclusion.

I hope with your new position as the Chairman of the Civil Service Selection and Training Board of the Government of Myanmar, you will have even more access and

more coordinating power so that your position as the Chair of the TCG will be even more enhanced and assuring the success which will also be very much welcome by the donor and international community. You have all the support, all of the goodwill, and certainly very much indebted to you and through you, to the Government of Myanmar for allowing the space for ASEAN to grow. Through this effort together, we have been able to live up to the true meaning of TEAM—Together Everyone Achieves More.

Thank you.