

**41st AMM  
17 - 24 July 2008  
Shangri-La, Singapore**

**Special ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting: Transcript of Press  
Conference, 19 May 2008**

[The following is the transcript of the question-and-answer session following Minister George Yeo's reading of the Special ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting Chairman's Statement.]

Minister Yeo: We had a very good meeting today, officials' in the morning and ministers' over lunch and after lunch. This was an emergency meeting convened as a result of Cyclone Nargis. The idea for a meeting was put to Myanmar not long after the tragedy, in which Myanmar agreed to almost immediately. I now open the floor to questions from you.

Q: Sri Jeya from CNBC Asia. Clearly it is a very welcome and a positive development, but can you tell us why it's taken so long to get to this position? It has almost been two weeks since Cyclone Nargis devastated Myanmar. Clearly these efforts would have been welcomed sooner rather than later. Can you tell us why it has taken so long?

Minister Yeo: We wished it could have been done sooner but given the magnitude of the disaster and the decisions taken by the Yangon government, we are happy to have reached this point today; better late than never.

Q: Sandra Ratzow, German Television, ARD German Television. Will Myanmar accept more aid workers from Western countries?

Minister Yeo: We've agreed that the mechanism for international assistance to Myanmar will go through this ASEAN mechanism. A task force has been established, a detailed mechanism will be set up and international assistance which is appropriate to Myanmar's needs, and which is acceptable to the Myanmar government will then flow in freely.

Q: So it is not decided whether... that means that people from Western countries will travel to Myanmar or not?

Minister Yeo: I think we have to look at the specific needs and specific offers of help. There will not be uncontrolled entry of foreign personnel to Myanmar.

Q: But controlled entry?

Minister Yeo: That's possible, but the immediate assistance will be provided through ASEAN.

Q: Mr Chairman, I'm Farik Zolkeph from The Star, Malaysia. So when will the medical personnel be despatched to Myanmar and is it through individual countries or one team through ASEAN?

Minister Yeo: A number of countries have already despatched medical personnel to Myanmar - Thailand, China, Bangladesh, India, Laos and Malaysia. This morning we were happy to hear that Myanmar welcomed the immediate despatch of medical personnel of all the other ASEAN countries as well, and all of us who are ready to do so will do so as quickly as possible.

Q: Is there any monetary aid to the victims?

Minister Yeo: Many pledges have already been made, and more pledges will be made during the pledging conference.

Q: Thank you.

Q: Good afternoon. Margarita Ortigas, Al Jazeera. I was just wondering if it would be possible to hear from the

Foreign Minister of Myanmar as to why it appeared that there was some resistance from the government to receiving international aid at the onset of the Cyclone.

Minister Yeo: I would rather not go into all these. We are here meeting as ASEAN to decide a common course of action, and we would rather not go over all these questions, which can always be addressed to the Myanmar Minister separately.

Q: I am from AFP. I just want to know if Myanmar gave a ball park figure of how much aid it needs in billions of US dollars.

Minister Yeo: The Foreign Minister of Myanmar told us that their estimate of the losses caused by the Cyclone Nargis is well over 10 billion US dollars, so their needs are enormous, not only for rescue and recovery but also for rehabilitation and the full recovery of their economy. They have many needs, not only food and clean water, but many homes have been lost. They need galvanised iron sheets for shelter. They need boats so that people living in the delta can recover their livelihoods quickly. They need schools in large numbers. They need infrastructure. They need a whole array of things, and this list will be drawn up, and through the mechanism which will be established, we will categorise them quickly, and see how we can, in phases, address those needs.

Q: My name is Fujiyoshi from NHK Japan. Could you elaborate more on the pledge meeting in Yangon on the 25th of May? How many countries are going to participate in the pledge?

Minister Yeo: We have been in communication with the UN Secretary General and what is envisaged is a call to all the countries of the UN to come to this pledging conference and to offer whatever they can to help Myanmar. This would be held on the 25th of May in Yangon.

Q: I am Nimura from NHK Japan. Does Myanmar government still have the policy not to accept any foreign journalists? Because from Myanmar, it is very difficult to understand what is going on, and without any foreign journalist, we cannot get any information.

Minister Yeo: I think you can address it to the Myanmar Foreign Minister separately after this conference.

Q: You did not discuss any about the access for the media?

Minister Yeo: No.

Q: This is James Hookway from The Wall Street Journal. Do you foresee see any potential role for the World Bank or Asian Development Bank in the longer-term rehabilitation of Myanmar, given the scale of what is going on there; and considering the World Bank and ADB, since they have not been doing any business there since 1990?

Minister Yeo: Indeed we see a major role to be played by the World Bank and the ADB. When ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan was in Washington recently, he had a good discussion with the World Bank President Zoellick, and he was quick to issue a statement expressing the willingness of the World Bank to help Myanmar in its recovery effort, so we expect to work closely with the World Bank and the ADB in this undertaking.

Q: Did you get into any details about how you will be able to circumvent the World Bank's policy of not doing business with Myanmar at this point? Is there any way of doing that you have discussed with World Bank and ADB?

Minister Yeo: We didn't discuss it, but if those restrictions were still insuperable, I do believe that President Zoellick would not have issued that statement which he did.

Q: I am from AP. ASEAN says it will do anything it can to speed up the aid and relief efforts for the people of Myanmar. What about, I heard there were ships from France and US full of medical supplies and aid, they (were) waiting to go in. Is ASEAN doing something to maybe convince Myanmar to let them in?

Minister Yeo: I think we will establish the mechanism quickly so that aid from countries all over the world can flow into Myanmar, in such a way that we don't politicise the aid.

Q: I have a follow-up question to that one, because those ships (Annie from BBC) were apparently wide of the coast of Myanmar now, how do we set up the mechanism to give the aid to ASEAN if we have ships about 30 nautical miles off the coast of Myanmar currently? So how is that going to work please? Thank you.

Minister Yeo: A detailed mechanism will be established where aid teams come to Myanmar through channels which are open for this purpose. It doesn't make sense for us to work on the basis of forcing aid on Myanmar, because that will create unnecessary complications and will only lead to more suffering for the Myanmar

people. So it's not a course of action that finds favour among us in ASEAN.

NHK: I am Fujiyoshi from NHK. Let me ask again on the pledge meeting in Yangon. That meeting, which kind of level of meeting is it? Is it a ministerial meeting or senior officials meeting?

Minister Yeo: We envisage the meeting to be at ministerial level. We know that some countries may not be able to send their ministers, so at a level as high as possible to show our commitment to this cause. But ASEAN will be represented at the ministerial level.

Q: I am Kinsey from Hearst Publications from New York and also with the Environment Nutrition. The Irrawaddy Delta region is extremely complicated with many waterways and very difficult to get into, and this is the basic problem. Is Myanmar military ready to assist with expediting the boats to get into these remote areas? Are you open to the scenario that the ships are sitting out waiting in the docks, I mean it is quite a long way to get in, and this is the real problem, and that is get up into the more remote areas. This is number one question, and number two is on food security. I understand from the Foreign Minister of Japan that Myanmar believes that they have enough food at this point. If it is difficult to get into these areas, are you open to air drops?

Minister Yeo: I think this is a major issue we have to look at, which ASEAN has to work together with the international agencies and the Myanmar government.

Q: Siew Hua from The Straits Times. Are we able to get a fuller picture of the devastation from the Assessment Team's report?

Minister Yeo (looking at ASEAN Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan): Are we able to release the Assessment Team's report? (Pause) Surin, are we able to release the Assessment Team's report?

ASEAN Secretary-General Pitsuwan: Yes, Sir. We are able to release the Assessment Team's report. It is a preliminary, general report.

Minister Yeo: We will release the Assessment Team's report. Yes, the gentleman behind. Oh, before you ask a question, Surin will be visiting Myanmar in the next few days in order to do consultations and to begin the process of establishing this ASEAN mechanism.

Reuter: Neil Chatterjee from Reuters. Could you tell us when exactly will the ASEAN medical workers enter Myanmar and also to clarify will aid workers from non-ASEAN will also be allowed in, for example from the United States?

Minister Yeo: We have already said that aid workers from Thailand, Laos, and Malaysia are already in Myanmar. These are all ASEAN countries. From the ASEAN countries, they have been on stand-by for a while now so they are going in as quickly as they can. As for the other countries, I think let's take it one at a time, establish a clear idea of their needs and work with the Myanmar government and to see how these needs can be met. Last question, because some of us have to rush to the airport to catch their flights. If not, thank you very much.

**19 May 2008**

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