

Joint ASEAN-UN Press Release
Comprehensive Assessment of Cyclone Nargis Impact Provides Clearer Picture of Relief and Recovery Needs

Singapore, 21 July 2008

Today, the Government of the Union of Myanmar, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the United Nations (UN) released the Post-Nargis Joint Assessment (PONJA) report. This assessment – commissioned as part of the tri-partite cooperation between the Government of the Union of Myanmar, ASEAN and the United Nations – provides the first comprehensive picture and objective analysis of the devastating impact on the people in the Ayeyarwady Delta and Yangon affected by Cyclone Nargis, which struck Myanmar on 02 and 03 May and killed over 84,530 people, with a further 53,836 still reported missing.

Cyclone Nargis was the most devastating natural disaster in Myanmar's history, and the assessment of damage and losses confirms a similar scale of impact to that of the Indian Ocean Tsunami in Indonesia in 2004, especially at the household and community level. The cyclone and resulting storm surge destroyed about 450,000 homes and damaged 350,000 others. 75 per cent of health facilities in the affected areas were destroyed or severely damaged, together with around 4,000 schools. The cyclone wiped out the livelihoods of families overnight, flooding over 600,000 hectares of agricultural land, killing up to 50 per cent of draught animals, destroying fishing boats and sweeping away food stocks and agricultural implements. This has left households extremely vulnerable – in mid-June, 55 per cent reported having only one day of food stocks or less, and have relied in part on the steady flow of relief supplies. The total economic losses amount to about 2.7% of the projected 2008 GDP, with the effects of the cyclone concentrated on a region important for agriculture and fishing in Myanmar.

National, regional and international responders have been working since early May to urgently bring assistance to the affected communities, especially the most vulnerable groups, in the face of continuing logistical and operational challenges.

The PONJA Report provides a broad and objective framework of the scale, scope and priority areas where assistance is needed to help the people of the Delta recover from this traumatic and devastating event. Recovery needs, which are estimated at just over a total of US\$1 billion over the next 3 years, include the most urgent priorities of significant food, agriculture, housing, basic services and support to communities for restoring their livelihoods and rebuilding assets. The relief and early recovery activities presented in the revised Appeal issued on 10 July by the UN are designed to meet these urgent priorities in the coming months until April 2009, for which some USD 303.6 million is being requested.

“While significant progress has been made to date, we are still in the relief phase of this aid operation,” said John Holmes, UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs.

“Nearly three months after Cyclone Nargis struck Myanmar, the Government and its humanitarian partners are continuing to assist the humanitarian needs of the most vulnerable communities,” Holmes emphasised. “That said, funding for parallel early recovery activities also is needed to urgently restore sustainable livelihoods, ensure access to basic services, and help revitalize communities”.

Significant efforts and cost are projected for housing, education, restoring livelihoods and religious buildings over the next three years. According to consultations with communities during the assessment process, schools and religious centres are the most urgent rebuilding priorities, while assistance for repairs and grants for livelihoods are the highest priority for immediate assistance. Over 90 per cent of these needs are at the community level and can be addressed through community-based approaches. The indicative estimate of recovery needs and costs is preliminary and will need to be updated over time, reflecting the experience of other natural disasters in the region which demonstrate the importance of refining assessments and recovery plans at a sectoral level.

This is the first time that ASEAN has played such a leading role in responding to a natural disaster affecting one of its Member States. ASEAN facilitated and coordinated international assistance to the survivors of the cyclone as well as the conduct of this assessment. At their special meeting on 19 May, ASEAN Foreign Ministers established the ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force for the Victims of Cyclone Nargis, headed by the Secretary-General of ASEAN, which works closely with the United Nations and the Myanmar Government to coordinate international assistance. Secretary-General of ASEAN Dr Surin Pitsuwan said, “By linking hands with the UN, the international NGOs, and the rest of the world, ASEAN has shown how international humanitarian cooperation can work to help bring relief and assistance to the victims of Cyclone Nargis. At the same time, ASEAN is putting into action its pledge to build a caring and sharing community.”

Dr Surin added, “This PONJA Report is but one of the many steps needed to help the Nargis victims recover from the devastation. The road to recovery will be long and more post-PONJA activities will be needed to help the affected communities get back on their feet again. The international community has expressed their support that ASEAN continues its presence in Myanmar for the relief and early recovery phase in the next 12 months.”

The Tripartite Core Group, a working level mechanism, brings together ASEAN, the Myanmar Government, and the United Nations to provide guidance and address issues related to the response effort. This joint assessment and strong coordination mechanism will provide the foundation for the enormous efforts still required to help the affected population recover from the cyclone.

As well as providing the basis for the way forward, the PONJA assessment also identifies a number of principles that should guide relief and recovery efforts, including building local capacity, monitoring delivery, quality and impact of aid, and involving communities at all stages of the relief and recovery process. Applying these principles as part of a continued inclusive process between the Myanmar Government, the international community and local communities will be essential to meet the needs of the cyclone-affected population and to help build the resilience of Myanmar communities to prepare for and face future disasters.