

Press Conference for the Release of the Post-Nargis Joint Assessment Report

**Statement by John Holmes,
Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs
and Emergency Relief Coordinator**

21 July 2008

Secretary-General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to participate today in the release of the Post-Nargis Joint Assessment Report, and I thank the ASEAN Chair, the ASEAN Secretary-General and Member States for inviting me to join them here today, as Emergency Relief Coordinator. The leadership role of ASEAN, with the Government of Myanmar and the UN, in the response to the devastation wrought by Cyclone Nargis on 2 and 3 May, has been critical to the effectiveness of the relief effort. ASEAN has been instrumental in facilitating a coordinated response to the needs of the people most affected. The report presented here today is a key outcome of this coordination.

Let me also say straight away that I and my colleagues have been very impressed both by the process which led to this report, including the full access for all concerned to all parts of the affected areas, and by the high quality and readability of the report itself. The fieldwork and data collection, involving some 250 staff from the Government of the Union of Myanmar, from ASEAN, and from UN agencies as well as national and international non-governmental organizations, was truly extensive and thorough. Each contributing partner provided their own expertise. Together this produced a report stronger than any of us could have done individually, and indeed it is a credible and comprehensive assessment which in many ways sets new standards for disasters of this kind, and prompts reflection on how we might replicate it in similar circumstances elsewhere, even if we might want to start at a much earlier stage after a disaster. In this context, the Tripartite Core Group – the response framework which brings together the Government of the Union of Myanmar, ASEAN, and the United Nations to coordinate the relief efforts – has proved itself to be a vital mechanism, which I strongly believe needs to continue its work.

The quality of the assessment is important for several reasons: first and foremost in telling us how much we still have to do on the emergency relief side in so many of the key sectors, helping to ensure that the response to the cyclone continues to reach those most in need with the right kind of assistance, and also in reassuring us that the initial relief efforts had indeed reached most of those affected with at least some assistance, and that the second wave of deaths that from disease and starvation had not actually happened. Second, it is also important to assure donors and development partners that their resources are well spent, because it provides a baseline against which future progress in the relief and recovery effort can be measured, and that their further assistance is fully justified. The key requests put forward by donors at the Donor Pledging Conference on 25 May in Yangon were that there must be full access to the affected area and a credible joint assessment, both of which have now been met. Finally, and of equal

importance, I believe that the report tells an important part of the story of Cyclone Nargis: not of the devastating toll, with nearly 140,000 people dead and missing, but of the extraordinary resilience and courage of the people of the delta themselves, who not only survived the cyclone but have already begun to rebuild their lives in a spirit of solidarity.

I am particularly pleased in general that the PoNJA report puts the people and their needs and views squarely at the heart of what it is saying, for example bringing out what they themselves think the longer-term recovery priorities for their communities should be, and for example the vital importance of land tenure issues and proper consideration and consultation of land smallholders for the future.

On 10 July at the United Nations in New York, I presented the Revised Appeal for Myanmar, which sought further funding for both immediate relief needs and early recovery activities. The findings of the PoNJA report fed into the priorities of that appeal, while also providing a realistic longer-term framework within which our short-term efforts can be anchored. In New York, we appealed for \$482 million altogether, of which we still need around \$300 million for the period up to April 2009. I hope donors will go on responding generously to this emergency relief and recovery appeal. I am glad to see the high degree of complementarity between the Appeal and this assessment because this will ensure that the results of our work will be sustainable in the long run. Tomorrow I will be returning to Myanmar in order to see for myself how the response has been unfolding in the wake of my last trip with the UN Secretary-General in May. I will hold discussions with the Government, the Tripartite Core Group and the humanitarian community on the best way forward as relief and early recovery efforts continue.

I hope this report will be used not only to identify the needs of the vulnerable, but also as a tool to judge the effectiveness of our joint response in meeting those needs. We know that natural disasters know no boundaries, and that the best we can do is to take measures to reduce vulnerability to them before they strike, to be prepared to respond when they do strike, and to make sure that the response is as good and as well coordinated as it can be after they have struck. And that means governments and the international community working together at every stage to bring help to those who need it most. I think there are lessons for all of us here from the Myanmar experience.

Let me make one final point. From the UN side, we are delighted to have been able to work with ASEAN so closely on the post-Nargis response, but this should not be a one-off effort. We were already working with ASEAN and ASEAN member countries before Nargis struck, not least on building capacity on the humanitarian side. There is now an opportunity to go much further in the future, and to create a model for other parts of the world in how the UN and regional organizations can work together on humanitarian issues, disaster risk reduction and emergency response. We are ready to play our full part in this.

Thank you.