

**ASEAN AND MYANMAR : THE WAY FORWARD**  
**Presentation of Ms. Than Than Htay**  
**At the 22<sup>nd</sup> Asia-Pacific Roundtable**  
**(2 -5 June 2008)**

Mr.Chairman,  
Distinguish Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to participate in this prestigious meeting. I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Malaysia ISIS for its warm welcome and generous hospitality extended to me.

Myanmar's membership to the regional organization was realized only after 30 years of its existence. Even though we only joined ASEAN in 1997, traditional ties of friendship, understanding and cooperation with the member countries of the Association have prevailed through out the time in keeping with the basis principles of her foreign policy.

**Political and Security Cooperation**

After joining ASEAN, Myanmar has increased interactions with ASEAN countries. The Head of State of Myanmar has paid good-will visits to most of the ASEAN countries. ASEAN Heads of States also paid their visits to Myanmar in return. The exchange of visits strengthened the ties among the ASEAN countries. The leaders also meet virtually every year through the mechanism of formal or informal summits. More frequent exchanges of views will solidified the ASEAN unity and convergence of views among the leaders.

Myanmar, as a responsible member of ASEAN, reiterate a sustainable and harmonious approach towards achieving peace, stability and the well-being of the region in relations among ASEAN countries.

Myanmar always adhere to the ASEAN Basic principals and “ASEAN WAY” of doing things. Unity within ASEAN is very important, without unity, ASEAN could not be stand firmly as a regional organization. We admit we have different of opinion and different way of doing things. It is natural that we have different of opinion and view. Only thing which is important is we must avoid doing or saying things which will jeopardize the unity of ASEAN or losing the trust within the Association.

Even though Myanmar has fulfilled all the obligations and responsibilities as a member state and participated in the ASEAN meeting which are more than 600 meetings a year. It is not easy for Myanmar, as a least development country and facing with so many economic sanctions from western countries and political pressure, to attend these numerous meetings. Even though we are going through a difficult time we give priority to participate in the ASEAN activities as a responsible and dedicated member country. We also cherish and grateful for the support of ASEAN countries in the international fora.

It is also a very hard time for Myanmar, our social and political situation is very complex and complicated. It is not easy to understand the situation from outside.

I found that most of the concerns are addressed to the issues of Democracy and Human Rights. In fact, the problems of Myanmar are far more complex than the issue of human rights and democracy.

Therefore, the government has taken a comprehensive and long-term approach in solving those problems which has been a rooted since colonial time. The current preoccupation of the government is

not only addressing the issue of human rights and democracy but also addressing pertinent aspects of territorial integrity, national unity, rule of law, and economic and human resource development.

## **Road to Democracy**

I wish to touch on the issue of democracy in Myanmar. One of the basic principles in ASEAN Charter is that Member countries have to adhere to the rule of law, good governance, the principle of democracy and constitutional government. The government of Myanmar is taking the measures in line with the aspiration of ASEAN. The present government is fully committed to its 7-step roadmap to democracy and steadily implementing these steps.

The Government of Myanmar has successfully held referendum for Draft Constitution and 92.48% of the eligible voters supported the Draft Constitution to be adopted.

Some ASEAN countries misunderstand Myanmar Government actions during the crisis between the Government and some monks in September 2007. I think these countries will understand now that the people of Myanmar have chosen peaceful means for transfer of power which will benefit not only Myanmar but also for our regional peace and stability.

I do not think that you would like to see or have another Iraq or Afghanistan within your region. Myanmar is the back door of ASEAN. Peaceful and stable Myanmar is more beneficial to ASEAN than a country with internal fighting and with bankrupt economy.

We strongly believe that without the home-grown solution and participation of the people of respective countries, it is far from achieving the desired goals. International community should give encouragement and help the peoples and the government have

internal capability to stand on its own. Only than could provide long-lasting solution to the problems. Other than that, sanctions will only aggravate the problems and hurt the majority of the people.

### **The Way Forward**

Myanmar had signed the ASEAN Charter at the 13th ASEAN Summit in Singapore which marks the historic milestone of the ASEAN. It will confer ASEAN a legal personality, provide a stronger institutional basis and reinforce ASEAN as a serious player in the international community. Now we are making preparation to ratify the Charter in July. We are also committed participate in drafting to form ASEAN political and Security Community (ASPC) and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC).

The cyclon Nargis had shown that Myanmar can work together with ASEAN brothers and sisters and also with the international community in times of emergencies. The Special Meeting of ASEAN Foreign Ministers held in Singapore agreed to establish an ASEAN-led coordinating mechanism to realize this, an ASEAN Humanitarian Task Force for the Victims of Cyclone Nargis was established. Upon the initiation of ASEAN Task Force a Tripartite Core Group comprising representatives from the Government of Myanmar, ASEAN and UN as a working mechanism for coordinating, facilitating, and monitoring the flow of international assistance into the country.

The ASEAN-UN International Pledging Conference was held in Yangon and 52 countries pledge generously for resettlement and rehabilitation of the Cyclone hit area. What I want to say is Myanmar is cooperating with ASEAN and other International community and INGOs. We are deeply grateful for providing aid and sending medical teams from ASEAN and friendly countries.

The Government is accepting aid from International community. If some countries really want to give aid to the people they don't have to wait with warships till they get permission to enter our territory. They can deliver the aid like other international community and INGOs are doing. I am regret that they used this tragic accident to give pressure upon the government instead of giving a helping hand to the victims of Nargis.

Prime Minister had already, stated that Myanmar would warmly welcome any assistance and aid which are provided with genuine goodwill from any country or organization, provided that there are no strings attached nor politicization involved. Donation of relief supplies for the cyclone victims in Myanmar will be accepted through land route, by sea or by air. For the relief supplies coming by sea, these supplies can be send by civilian ships to the port of Yangon.

## **Conclusion**

I do believe the future of ASEAN is bright with unity and cooperation among the members countries. Myanmar always regards her relations with ASEAN is very important and we always believe that " a friend in need is a friend indeed".

Through hard time and good time, Myanmar will remain committed to her obligation to the association and determine to contribute regional stability and security leading to world peace through her membership to ASEAN.

***Thank you.***