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ASEAN aid to Myanmar must match the devastation

The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC) urges regional leaders to ensure that the ASEAN-led coordinating mechanism with the Myanmar authorities, for aid to victims of Cyclone Nargis, guarantees immediate, sufficient and effective help to survivors.

ASEAN must not allow this agreement to be yet another empty promise and diversion tactic of the Myanmar military junta. Delays on aid supplies and expertise must not be tolerated. The 2.5 million survivors – men, women and children who are members of our regional community - cannot afford any more delays. It has been close to three weeks since the cyclone hit Myanmar.

ASEAN must further specify how the coordinating mechanism will work to ensure that it speeds up and focuses human and material resources for a comprehensive program for immediate relief and long-term rehabilitation, not merely as a means to inhibit transparency and accountability.

“What exactly is ASEAN’s role? Will ASEAN help direct operations or merely be the telephone operator for the military regime? We are talking about saving innocent lives here and there needs to be more done,” said AIPMC President Kraisak Choonhavan.

ASEAN has to further ensure that it establishes an extensive mechanism that will ensure future disasters in the region will be addressed expediently and successfully.

ASEAN lacks the financial, material and human capacity needed for this massive effort. It needs to meaningfully involve the international community who are ready and equipped with the necessary expertise and resources. Countries such as France, the United Kingdom, United States and other European countries should be allow to have a significant role in the ASEAN’s efforts such as they did in the aftermath of the 2004 Asian Tsunami.

The junta’s continued refusal to allow nations with the required capacity and skills to tackle the outcomes of the disaster is extremely worrying. ASEAN cannot afford its tip-toeing around the military authorities of Myanmar.

The regional caucus reminds ASEAN not to be complacent while awaiting the ASEAN-UN donor meeting scheduled for Sunday, 25 May. Every delay means more deaths. ASEAN needs to now use the mechanism and impending meeting as leverage to open up the affected region to aid. The region cannot afford more talk and less action.

ASEAN needs to show that it is effective by acting quickly and by not allowing the junta to stifle international aid.

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