

20 May 2008

## **Secretary-General's press encounter prior to Security Council Thematic Debate on Post-conflict Peacebuilding (unofficial transcript)**

Good morning ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure to see you.

As you all know, I leave for Myanmar this morning. I will fly from New York to Bangkok and visit Yangon on early Thursday morning, May 22nd. I will stay there until May 23rd. From there I will tour the Ayeyarwady delta area, the most affected area, and other areas where I will be led by the Myanmar government. And afterwards I will return to Yangon to meet with the leadership and senior government officials of Myanmar.

On Sunday, May 25th, I will return to Yangon again to participate in the pledging conference sponsored by ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] and the United Nations. I will return to New York on Monday morning. I also look forward to meeting the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Thailand to discuss all these humanitarian and other issues related to Myanmar.

This is a critical moment for Myanmar. We have a functioning relief program in place but, so far, have been able to reach only about 25 percent of Myanmar's people in need. My aim in going to Myanmar is to first of all demonstrate my sympathy to the people and government at this time of crisis and challenge, and to see for myself the situation on the ground, particularly in areas most affected by the disaster - unprecedented in Myanmar's history.

And I will have the opportunity to meet with UN staff as well as NGOs and aid workers during my stay in Yangon. My role and the role of the UN, working closely with ASEAN and the government of Myanmar, will be to ensure that all these efforts are well-coordinated and as effective as they can be under these difficult circumstances. I will do my utmost for the people of Myanmar.

I want to see the conditions under which relief teams are working, and I intend to do all I can to reinforce their efforts in coordination with Myanmar authorities and international aid agencies. I will discuss with everyone - Myanmar government officials, the leaders of neighboring countries, relief coordinators and international donors - the way forward and how best to save lives and prevent further hardship.

I welcome the government of Myanmar's recent flexibility. Yesterday it agreed to allow Asian relief workers, under the auspices of ASEAN, to oversee and begin distributing international aid supplies. We have received government permission to operate nine WFP helicopters, which will allow us to reach areas that have so far been largely inaccessible.

I believe further similar moves will follow - including expediting the visas of relief workers seeking to enter the country. I am confident that emergency relief efforts can be scaled up quickly.

Even as we attend to today's emergency we must give thought to Myanmar's longer-term reconstruction and rehabilitation. Foreign Minister Nyan Win has estimated losses at more than \$10 billion. As you know, Cyclone Nargis devastated Myanmar's agricultural heartland. It may be already too late for farmers of Myanmar to plant the next harvest, and this will compound the present crisis. In this sense, the economic effects of the natural disaster that has struck Myanmar could be more severe and longer-lasting than the 2004 tsunami. These issues will be the subject of the May 25 pledging conference in Yangon.

Thank you very much.

Q: The ASEAN Foreign Ministers yesterday did make some progress but in your eyes, is that progress enough? Is it sufficient and what more would you like to more specifically to see come out of your trip in terms of commitments to open up?

A: I'll discuss with ASEAN leaders how best we can coordinate. The coordination between the United Nations and ASEAN will be crucially important and in that regard, I am encouraged that ASEAN leaders have taken initiative and leadership roles in addressing this issue. ASEAN Foreign Ministers yesterday, in their statement made it quite clear. This humanitarian assistance and campaign will be led by ASEAN mechanisms. At the same time, as you may remember, I have proposed to ASEAN to establish sort of a logistical hub near Myanmar but outside Myanmar. One idea would be to nominate or appoint a joint humanitarian coordinator between the United Nations and ASEAN.

Q: You met this morning with the Foreign Minister of Great Britain. Did you discuss the situation in Myanmar with him? And also are you in touch with Chinese government? Have they sought any particular help from you?

SG: Yes, I did discuss with the Secretary of the United Kingdom, Mr. Miliband, on the ways and means, how the international community, particularly the United Nations, can lead and facilitate these aid programmes to Myanmar. We agreed that the whole international community should work together very closely, and he commented on the initiatives and role of the United Nations.

Regarding the earthquake tragedy in China, I already expressed my most sincere sympathies and condolences. Yesterday I signed the condolences book at the Chinese Mission. I know that the Chinese and Myanmar authorities have declared three days, since yesterday, their national mourning and I attended that briefly at the Chinese Mission. I again assured the Chinese authorities that the United Nations will fully stand behind Chinese efforts to overcome this national tragedy. As you know, we have earmarked \$7 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and [the UN has offered to dispatch experts] in relief and rescue operations from the United Nations.

Q: Are you planning to meet General Than Shwe during your visit?

SG: Yes, I hope I will be meeting Senior General Than Shwe and other senior government officials of the Myanmar authorities.

Thank you very much.