Introduction

1. The proposal was first put forward at the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting Retreat (ADMM Retreat) on 19 November 2014, in Bagan, Myanmar. It was suggested that a ready group among the militaries of the ASEAN Member States be established for quick deployment to countries facing disaster emergency.

2. As a background, in such hard times, the defence and military sectors are always expected to be ready to respond speedily, effectively and in coordinated manner. As observed, the people would so expect given that militaries are trained in such situations and able to utilize the reliable assets. Admittedly, the situation may vary between the Member States on the role of the militaries, nevertheless, the fact remains that the military, although it may not be its primal task at the national level, has been significantly deployed to assist in disaster emergency.

3. Frequently, especially in recent times, we bear witness to disasters striking our region, and the efforts mounted by the military, law enforcement and civilian agencies in coordination to render help to those in need. While it is observed that the efforts are encouraging, it is noted that improvement can still be made to make the current arrangements more organised and structured and have a faster time to assist the victims.

4. Another significant observation was made during the 2nd Joint Task Force Meeting to Promote Synergy on HADR, whereby it was mentioned that the 25th ASEAN Committee for Disaster Management (ACDM) agreed to enhance ASEAN’s visibility in humanitarian response by formulating guidelines on carrying both national

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1 The Paper acknowledges the jurisdiction and the authority of the AHA Centre as the operational engine in disaster management outlined under AADMER. It therefore follows that the Group should become part of the regional response mechanisms as coordinated by AHA Centre and at the national level, as the whole-of-government approach i.e. maybe linked to the civilian agencies of the government, depending on the national structures.

2 Disaster emergency means a situation where a state declares that it is unable to cope with a disaster: AADMER.
and ASEAN flag or logo to underscore ASEAN responding together as one. Hence, this proposal for an ASEAN Militaries Ready Group will support the statement.

Acknowledgement

5. This paper notes these arrangements and instruments and their guiding relevance, especially on the urgency to establish an ASEAN standby arrangement for emergency response:

a. ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER); and the related ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre), Emergency Response and Assessment Team (ERAT), ASEAN Standby Arrangements and Coordination of Joint Disaster Relief and Emergency Response Operations (SASOP), and the establishment of a Joint Task Force to Promote Synergy on HADR, to promote among others, civil-military coordination and coordinated HADR efforts in the ASEAN region.

b. The Terms of Reference (TOR) of the Secretary-General of ASEAN as the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance Coordinator, adopted by the ASEAN Coordinating Council in May 2014, and welcomed by the ASEAN Leaders at the 24th ASEAN Summit in May 2014.


d. Provisional Standard Operating Procedure for ASEAN Armies in HADR Operations.

f. Specific national security directives, particularly in determining the roles of militaries in disaster or emergency crises.

Purpose

6. The purpose of the establishment of the group is to prepare for an ASEAN military team for quick deployment to areas of crises in coordinated manner.

7. This Concept Paper seeks to address in general, the coordination of joined services at the national levels working under a single ASEAN banner at a multilateral level taking into account the existing regional response mechanisms as coordinated by AHA Centre.

8. In some foreseeable cases of disasters occurring, and subject to the consent and capacity of the affected State in preventing and mitigating the risks, the Group could serve as a preventive mechanism rather than only reactive towards a crisis.

9. The Group shall build on and complement existing arrangements under the AADMER and work under the coordination of the AHA Centre, and in cooperation with other relevant regional and international HADR partners.

Guiding Principles

10. Respecting national sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of the affected State, in accordance with the United Nations and ASEAN Charter.

11. Affected State shall have the primary responsibility to respond to a disaster occurring within its territory. External assistance or offers of assistance may only be provided upon the request or with the consent of the affected State.

12. Affected State shall exercise the overall direction, control, coordination and supervision of assistance within its territory.
13. Participation in the ASEAN Militaries Ready Group shall be flexible, non-binding and voluntary, and shall be consistent with the rights and obligations of the ASEAN Member States’ under any existing agreements to which they are parties.

14. Contributing ASEAN Member States’ military personnel and assets involved in HADR operations remain under their own national command and control. The final decision whether to deploy resources by the AMS remains a national decision.

**General Mechanism for Implementation**

15. The Group could consist of a special force comprising of pre-identified military personnel as part of the ASEAN standby arrangements. A minimum number of strength consisting of personnel and assets could be determined at the national level and based in the Member States’ countries. A database of points of contact, capacities and capabilities should be established. Some of the information can be built up from the database that are already in place, for instance the information of surgeon general contact points as established under EWG on Military Medicine.

16. Provision of services could be pre-identified and recorded. As an illustration, Malaysia’s medical team could provide for Level 1 Triage / Stabilisation / Land Evacuation or Outpatient consisting of three medical officers, ten paramedics, three support staff and two drivers for a 3-tonner and an SUV to be activated within 48 hours.

17. The deployment of the Group can be based on three natures according to the period, based on the needs of the affected State:

   17.1 Firstly, Urgent – which is to deploy the needs-assessment team including planners, medical and communication specialists (in this case ERAT could be utilized with addition of military specialists);
17.2 Secondly, Immediate – to deploy among others carrier and mobile air movement, forklift and fuel, search and rescue team (including dogs and medical rescuers), temporary shelter and field kitchen; and

17.3 Thirdly, Middle and Long-term – to deploy among others damage assessment team, engineers and heavy machinery.

18. The Group could train together, develop common procedures and interoperability utilizing the existing platforms such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) Experts’ Working Groups, including under EWGs on Humanitarian and Disaster Relief (HADR) and Military Medicine, and the AADMER’s mechanisms. The Group could be made involved starting from the planning stage up to the field training exercise.

19. The Group could also strengthen the Disaster Emergency Logistic System (DELSA) managed by the AHA Centre, including support the deployment of relief assets from the regional stockpile located at the UN Humanitarian Response Depot (UNHRD) in Subang, Malaysia.

20. Subject to the provisions under the Guiding Principles, and depending on the predictability of a disaster (although not the severity of it), the Group could be pre-deployed in the State facing imminent threat of a disaster together with the relief aid, taking into regard that time is of the essence.

21. The future instruments that could be developed include the Standard Operating Procedure and Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) to detail out and guide the cooperation, including in identifying the personnel and related capacities, special communication links, possible points of entry and deployment time. In formulating these, the other arrangements like the Joint Task Force (JTF) on HADR could be linked up to provide for comprehensive supporting instruments.

22. ASEAN Militaries’ representatives should become members at AHA Centre, which will serve as the process owner of the Group. The role of the military
representatives is to assist the AHA Centre to facilitate in deploying the group in timely manner.

**Identification and Security**

23. The Group shall carry both national and ASEAN flag in promoting more visibility of a single ASEAN and is able to be identified by appropriate markings or insignias. In so doing, relevant ASEAN guidelines could be referred to so as to provide for uniformity and that a common approach is adopted.

24. In principle, the military personnel in the Group shall not carry weapons while performing their duties within this cooperation. The affected State shall be responsible in providing adequate security measures.

**Costing and Funding**

25. The assistance of the Group shall be provided at no cost to the affected State, unless otherwise agreed upon between the related States.

**Follow-up Process**

26. Further discussions to look at the implementation, including the development of related documents will be undertaken through ad-hoc meetings utilizing the platform that already gathers the militaries of all Member States and/or the JTF on HADR.

**Conclusion**

27. This proposal is founded on the fact that ASEAN Member States are now, as observed, ready to allocate for a portion of the militaries to assist State in crises and emergency. To bring the practical and useful cooperation to another level, a systematic approach should be in place to minimize the damage and in some cases,
perhaps, avoid the catastrophic consequences. The recommendations in this proposal are hoped to help out in expediting military support from the Member States.