



# Between R2P and the ASEAN Way: The case of Myanmar's Cyclone Nargis

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## **Abstract:**

The following paper specifically addresses the challenge that the international norm of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) posed to the old 'ASEAN Way' of non-interference in the sovereign affairs of its members. It examines the extent to which the 'ASEAN Way' adapted in the face of the Cyclone Nargis R2P crisis. The paper argues that Myanmar's R2P crisis was a wakeup call for ASEAN. It not only challenged ASEAN's old ways of dealing with crisis but provided a potential precedent for dealing more effectively with regional problems through mediation, action and hybridity. This in turn allowed for pragmatic adaptation without a wholesale abandonment of the Association's founding principles and values.

**Keywords:** *ASEAN Way, Crisis, Cyclone Nargis, Intervention, Myanmar, Regionalism, Responsibility to Protect*

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# *Between R2P and the ASEAN Way: The case of Myanmar's Cyclone Nargis*

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*"We cannot hold a torch to light another's path without brightening our own."*

Ben Sweetland

## **Introduction**

It was on the night of the 2<sup>nd</sup> May that the worst recorded natural disaster in its history, a category four Cyclone called Nargis, hit Myanmar. It left a lasting impact not only on the population, infrastructure and economy of Myanmar but also on ASEAN and its way of dealing with crisis. The following paper specifically addresses the challenge that the international norm of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) posed to the old 'ASEAN Way' of non-interference in the sovereign affairs of its members. By examining the extent to which the 'ASEAN Way' adapted in the face of the Cyclone Nargis R2P crisis, the paper goes on to argue that Myanmar's R2P crisis was a wakeup call for ASEAN. It not only challenged ASEAN's old ways of dealing with crisis but provided a potential precedent for dealing more effectively with regional problems through mediation, action and hybridity. This allowed for pragmatic adaptation without a wholesale abandonment of the Association's founding principles and values.

## **Background**

Established in 1967, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) emerged as an important regional organization that would eventually bring the different countries of Southeast Asia together under one institutional umbrella. ASEAN became a touchstone for the aspirations of a region that had for so long endured the vagaries of foreign ideological and geo-political interests. An institutional vehicle that could foster a greater sense of a common Southeast Asian identity, facilitate an economically prosperous future for its members and promote co-operation on issues that beset the region.

To ensure the success of the ASEAN community, ASEAN established itself around a set of founding pillars, namely sovereignty, security, promoting peace and prosperity, consensus and respect for one another's sovereignty based on non-interference. These principles would form the basis of what became to be known as the 'ASEAN Way'. The fundamental principle of which is that no member has the right to interfere in another's domestic affairs. In other words, "the right of each state to lead its national existence free from external existence, Non-interference in the internal affairs of one another and the right of every state to lead its national existence free from external interference, subversion or coercion" (ASEAN, 2009).

ASEAN also maintained, before 2008, a non-legally binding character and placed the consent of the state as one of its inviolable requirements for cooperation. In contrast to the Western way of regional or international cooperation that favors legalism and confrontation, ASEAN member states preferred to conform to the regional organization's constitutive values that places the states' rights above the authority of the organization and requires that all agreements, though non-binding, shall be first and foremost through consensus and consultation and with the consent

of the state. However, as the ASEAN community expanded with the inclusion of some controversial countries in terms of human rights records, such as Myanmar in 1997, and particular regional conflicts and crisis attracting the attention of the international community, the ‘ASEAN Way’ came in for heavy criticism for a seemingly quiet and passive stance on serious human rights crises in Southeast Asia. ASEAN was accused of holding firm to its “non-interference” principle at the expense of human life in the region.

Cases such as the Indonesian invasion of East Timor in 1975 and the Cambodian Holocaust of 1975 to 1979 intensified the viewpoint that ASEAN was an ineffective organization in protecting human rights and lives despite a stated founding aim of promoting and building a strong and peaceful community with the “settlement of differences or disputes by peaceful means” (ASEAN, 2009).

Nonetheless, this seemingly overly passive approach by ASEAN underwent a major shift in the aftermath of the Cyclone Nargis when the Myanmar government denied foreign aid access. A situation that demanded ASEAN take decisive action otherwise the international community operating under the international norm of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) supersede the regional authority of ASEAN and take coercive action.

As a result, ASEAN decided to take the lead and step out of its old ASEAN “box” to avoid the potential repercussions of an internationally led sovereign interference in the crisis in Myanmar. As Bent and Langmore (2011: 53) point out, “Myanmar has been invaded several times since the 13<sup>th</sup> century and has always been wary of international interference in its internal affairs ... for more than 20 years the international community has made it clear that it despised the regime and

its undemocratic ways.” Given that “colonial legacies have traumatized places like Myanmar to a point where it is almost impossible to believe that the west would ever act selflessly, without an agenda and without strings attached” (2011: 53). According to Bent and Langmore (2011: 54) “the regime’s obvious fear of external intervention made ASEAN an ideal vehicle for invoking R2P in the case of Cyclone Nargis. However, built on the principle of non-interference, ASEAN was an unlikely, but well placed, organization to take the lead in opening Myanmar up to the international community.”

Before moving on to explore the three main aspects of ASEAN’s involvement in the Cyclone Nargis R2P crisis, the following section situates the emergence of the international norm of R2P in theory and practice as it relates to this paper.

### **Responsibility to Protect (R2P) as International norm**

The concept of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) first emerged at the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) and subsequently the United Nation’s World Summit adopted it as an international norm in the affairs of states in 2005. This was largely seen as a response to the UN’s previous failures to deal with humanitarian crises and intervene effectively in the infamous Rwanda genocide or the massacres in the Balkans in the 1990s (Asia Pacific Center for the Responsibility to Protect, 2008).



The guiding principles behind R2P are outlined in paragraphs 138 and 139 respectively of the 2005 Summit report:

*“Para 138: Each individual state has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement, through appropriate and necessary means. We accept that responsibility and will act in accordance with it. The international community should, as appropriate, encourage and help States to exercise this responsibility and support the United Nations in establishing a warning system*

*Para 139: The International Community, through the United Nations, also has the responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means in accordance with chapters VI and VIII of the Charter of the United Nations, to help protect populations from war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. In this context, we are prepared to take collective action, in a timely and decisive manner through the Security Council ... should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities manifestly failing to protect” (UN General Assembly, World Summit Outcome Document, 2005).*

As pointed out by the Asia Pacific Center for the Responsibility to Protect (2008: 6), R2P “deals with four specific crimes that are defined in international humanitarian law: Genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The principle document for understanding the nature of these crimes is the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.”

As a result, the principle of the responsibility to protect came to redefine the Westphalia notion of sovereignty as a responsibility not a right. This new international norm of the states’ and the international community’s responsibilities towards citizens revolutionized the old view of sovereignty as a sacred right on which name massacres can be justified. As Bent and Langmore (2011: 46) note, “the ambition of the creators of R2P was to reorient sovereignty from implying the right of states to ‘do as one pleases’ to a responsibility to its citizens.” Sovereignty now, under R2P, means the responsibility to protect the citizens against human rights violations. And

in case that a state fails to protect its own citizens' rights, the R2P norm gives the international community the right and duty to assist the state in protecting them. And, in case that the state is itself violating its citizens' human rights and refusing to conform to the international norm of R2P, the international community has the right to intervene based on the R2P principle to protect the citizens' human rights through "all means", be them peaceful or, if necessary, military.

Subsequent international crises, however, such as the Iraq war, interventions under the auspices of R2P came synonymous foreign military force rather than the principles and intent of liberal interventionism, namely helping people help themselves. Some critics viewed it as a disingenuous means of justifying the agendas of powerful military, economic and political interests in the name of the "protection" of human rights. For example, Bent & Langmore (2011) argue, powerful countries such as the US or France would invoke R2P to intervene in countries where they have interests while showing reluctance to protect human rights when it does not coincide with their own national interest as is the current case of Syria.

### **Cyclone Nargis as a natural disaster and an R2P crisis**

Cyclone Nargis (a category 4 tropical Cyclone) hit the heavily populated area of the Irrawaddy Delta on the 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2008. It was. It had a catastrophic impact on the population and the areas infrastructure with an estimated loss of 138,000 human lives and financial damage in the range of US\$ 10 billion (Asia Pacific Center for the Responsibility to Protect, 2008).

Cyclone Nargis was the worst recorded natural disaster in the history of Myanmar and the second deadliest in the North Indian Ocean Basin after Typhoon Nina of 1975 (Asia Pacific Center for the Responsibility to Protect, 2008).

The disastrous consequences were also amplified by Myanmar's Military Junta blocking access to all foreign humanitarian aid for fear of foreign interference in its domestic affairs. According to Bent & Langmore (2011), this standoff intensified with the presence of American and foreign ships and aircrafts "waiting off the coast, ready to land". Myanmar's Junta reacted by taking very strict measures to limit and block all potential foreign aid or intervention, a course of action that led an increase in fatalities and worsened the impact of the Cyclone. This raised concerns in the international community about its duty towards the victims of the Cyclone.

Subsequently, the Military Junta forced a CNN reporter to leave the country on account of his reporting on the effects of the disaster (Dan Rivers, 2010). Moreover, only NGO's actually operating in the country at the time such as *Medecins sans frontiers* and *Save the Children* were allowed to provide help under tight restrictions (Asia-Pacific Center for Responsibility to Protect, 2008). The Junta, then, officially announced its refusal of any foreign presence on the territory and put strict visa restrictions on all NGO's and international organizations' officials (Bent & Langmore, 2011). The Los Angeles Times (2008) reported that only a small amount of the aid provided was allowed to enter the country and NGOs present in the country claimed that foreign aid and supplies were kept by the military for themselves or sold by them in the black market.

As the situation worsened and reports reached to the international community, the French foreign minister Bernard Kouchner expressed his frustrations towards Myanmar and the international community and initiated talks about the crisis being an R2P situation. As Evans (2008) notes, a report was submitted to the United Nations highlighting the urgency and need for the application of the R2P norm to save the people of Myanmar from their governments' implicit crime against humanity by blocking foreign aid to the population.

ASEAN representatives, Indonesia and Vietnam as well as China, Britain and the undersecretary did not favour the French minister's proposal to the United Nations on the basis of its inapplicability to the Myanmar situation (Asia Pacific Center for Responsibility to Protect, 2011). Specifically, they viewed R2P as applicable to crimes against humanity, genocides etc. and not to natural disasters. As Chia (2008) explains, opponents of the French proposal viewed it as unnecessary, inapplicable and dangerous to relate the R2P norm to the case of Myanmar where the government is not directly killing the citizens.

Nonetheless, the Secretary General of the UN, other Security Council members and EU representatives for the Common Foreign and Security Policy did not share the latter view. As Philips (2008) points out, they considered Myanmar to be a humanitarian crisis given the government's refusal to save its citizens by denying them aid, which indirectly equates to a crime against humanity and killing of lives. Invoking the R2P principle in this basis allowed for a potential international intervention through all possible means.

Confronted by this proposition and the potential for a coercive foreign intervention through "all means" and given Myanmar's sensitivity towards its right of sovereignty and suspicion towards foreign interventions, placed ASEAN in a bind. As Bent and Langmore (2011: 50) noted, "such an approach would generate significant response opposition and aggression from Nayipidaw, who might have responded with a crackdown on civilians and aid workers, or worse, Myanmar's military government might have responded by launching an offensive against foreign aircraft delivering aid." Consequently, as Koh (2008: 8) argued, the use of force and coercion could cause more harm than good and actually "hurt the people [they were] trying to help." On the other hand, if ASEAN did not intervene it risked "being viewed as an ineffective regional body if it fails to take the lead" (Bent & Langmore, 2011: 13). As a result, ASEAN decided to actively

prevent the Cyclone crisis from falling under the auspices of R2P by moving from its traditional way of dealing with conflicts and crisis to a more constructive engagement with the problem. This was a significant turn from ASEAN's previous stands in earlier regional crises such as East Timor and Cambodia where it preferred to keep silent in respect of the respective countries' "sacred" sovereignty rights. The following sections detail the three main aspects of ASEAN's involvement in the Cyclone Nargis crisis.

## **ASEAN Responses**

### **Mediation and Action**

The Cyclone Nargis R2P crisis precipitated adaptation in the 'ASEAN Way'. According to Bent and Langmore (2011: 39) "Cyclone Nargis presented a unique challenge and opportunity for ASEAN to act as an intermediary between Myanmar and the international community." ASEAN played a pivotal role in solving the Cyclone Nargis R2P crisis through tri-level mediation: individual, regional and international.

### **At the Individual level**

At the individual level, the ASEAN secretariat played a major role in building trust and confidence and initiating talks and dialogue between the parties concerned. Given the complexity of the concept of R2P and its potential political and military fallout, the secretary of ASEAN Dr. Surin Pitsuwan played an active personal role alleviating the suspicions and ambiguities. Firstly,

Dr. Pitsuwan personally communicated with Myanmar leader to request him to admit ASEAN relief and rescue teams “immediately” (ASEAN Report 2010).

Secondly, Dr. Pitsuwan organized a meeting with the UN secretary of state Mr. Ban-Ki-Moon. During their meeting Dr. Pitsuwan sought reassurances about the intentions of the international community’s involvement and took care to de-politicize aid reaching Myanmar. He was keen to establish that the international community’s responsibility to protect the victims indeed meant the responsibility to protect (R2P) and not the right to invade (R2I) (Asia Pacific Center for Responsibility to Protect, 2008). The assurances garnered for the international community as to the humanitarian character did much to alleviate suspicions. Subsequently, Dr. Surin Pitsuwan traveled in person to Yangon to meet with the Junta leader, General Thein Sein. During their meeting, Dr. Pitsuwan set out in detail the necessary steps for the implementation of the May 19<sup>th</sup> ASEAN agreement (ASEAN, 2010). Dr. Pitsuwan also reassured the Junta leader about the political neutrality and the humanitarian character of international aid (ASEAN, 2010).

As a result of Dr. Pitsuwan’s individual mediation, dialogues were initiated between Than Shwe, the Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council, and the UN Secretary General Ban-Ki-Moon. In fact, Ban-Ki-Moon later visited Myanmar by himself to meet with the Junta leader and the Prime-Minister to discuss the situation in order to effectively collaborate in helping the victims (ASEAN, 2010).

## **At the Regional Level**

At the regional level, ASEAN played a crucial role in mediating between the regional parties. As the Cyclone made landfall, the ASEAN secretariat in Jakarta requested all ASEAN focal points to immediately mobilize for emergency and called all members to provide emergency relief assistance (Bent & Langmore, 2011). Moreover, ASEAN also held a special meeting that included all foreign ministers with the aim of coordinating action to directly reach to the victims (Asia Pacific Center for the Responsibility to Protect, (2008).

To ensure the effectiveness of the regional work, ASEAN set a strict condition on its members not to impose any conditions on Myanmar in order to avoid potential for political problems or ignite suspicions from Myanmar (Bellamy & Beeson, 2010). ASEAN also established the ASEAN Co-ordination Fund for Disaster Assistance (ACFDA) and an Emergency Rapid Assessment Team (ERAT) to effectively organize and deliver the regional aid (ASEAN, 2010). Furthermore, ASEAN led the ASEAN Coordinating mechanism in order to co-ordinate the relief efforts of Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia and organized two economic meetings amongst the members to manage the financial aid (ASEAN, 2010). ASEAN also managed the relations between the local NGO's such as the Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the Myanmar government (Asia Pacific Center for Responsibility to Protect, 2008).

Finally, and as a result of its regional mediation, ASEAN successfully persuaded the Myanmar government to allow the deployment of medical teams from ASEAN members and to grant access to humanitarian aid and regional coordinated relief and rehabilitation (Asia Pacific Center for Responsibility to Protect, 2008).

## **At the International Level**

ASEAN played a significant role as a third-party mediator between Myanmar and the international community. Firstly, ASEAN established a task force named the Tripartite Core Group (TCG) (ASEAN, 2010). The TCG played a role of a diplomatic body to co-ordinate between ASEAN members and the United Nations as well as to continuously supervise the relations between the UN, Myanmar and ASEAN (HD Center, 2009).

Secondly, an ASEAN-UN international pledging conference was organized in Yangon. The conference was composed of the ASEAN-led mechanism, the Myanmar government, the UN and the international community with the presence of fifty one representatives (ASEAN, 2010). During the conference, ASEAN successfully managed to build trust and initiate cooperation between the government of Myanmar and the international community. It was seen as “an important exercise towards building greater trust, confidence and cooperation between the Government and the international community” (ASEAN 2010: 20). Following the conference, a unanimous agreement was achieved for improved commitment to keep the access for aid open and be able to save the lives of the victims in the affected areas (ASEAN, 2010).

Furthermore, ASEAN secretary met with the president of the World Bank to discuss collaboration on relief efforts in Myanmar. As a result, the World Bank offered technical assistance in the form of human resource expertise (HD Center, 2009). Following his appointment as the head of the Humanitarian Task Force (AHTF), Dr. Surin met with representatives of World Bank, NGO’s such as the Red Cross and the Red Crescent as well as representatives from the UN, Myanmar and ASEAN (Amador III, 2009). Consequently, as a joint initiative, UN and ASEAN agreed to create a regional hub and to appoint a UN-ASEAN



humanitarian coordinator. A coordinating office was, thus, established in Yangon to work with representatives from the government and UN under TCG (Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2008). In addition, ASEAN also established the Recovery Coordination Center (RCC) which role was to promote co-operation and close relationships between and among the multiple governments, NGO's and UN agencies (ASEAN, 2010).

Finally, ASEAN established a post-Nargis joint assessment roundtable to get constructive feedback and recommendations from elements of the international community for the process of confining assessment report (ASEAN, 2010). According to Bent & Langmore (2011: 57) "ASEAN acted as a useful mediator through which the UN and by extension the international community, could secure assessments and delivery aids." As James Holmes, the UN Emergency Relief Co-ordinator also noted "ASEAN's coordination helped ASEAN, the UN and the Myanmar government to work effectively and prevented further deaths." (Holmes cited in Bent & Langmore, 2011: 56) The 'new' 'ASEAN Way' of mediation facilitated aid entry into the country, built trust between extreme parties and hastened the emergency relief while maintaining the political neutrality of the actors involved. It was not only the first time for ASEAN to take the lead in mediating and coordinating but was also the first opportunity to deploy its ASEAN-Emergency Rapid Assessment Team (ERAT) and implement the Disaster and Emergency Responses (HD Centre, 2009). In addition to that, the noteworthy proactive engagement of the ASEAN secretariat was also a first of its kind in the history of ASEAN (Bellamy & Beeson, 2010). ASEAN's direct engagement with the victims of the Cyclone through its ASEAN Volunteer Program which deployed forty ASEAN volunteers from seven ASEAN member states proved significant (ASEAN, 2010). The program implemented six community based early

recovery projects throughout the affected areas. It also managed to effectively gain partnerships with community based organizations and civil society in the spirit of the “people-oriented” ASEAN vision (ASEAN, 2010). The program encouraged the involvement of different sections of society and strengthened a sense of collective responsibility among ASEAN and its community. According to Arendshorst (2009), this gave some tangible credibility to the previously established but largely ineffectual ASEAN Human Rights mechanism.

In other words, the Cyclone Nargis R2P crisis set a precedent and gave birth to an adaptation in the ‘ASEAN Way’ with a more proactive mediation at multiple-levels, namely individual, regional, and international. The Post Cyclone ASEAN Way is a mean under which the concerned parties in a crisis can come together more effectively under one umbrella to work for peace, humanity and justice. A smarter ‘ASEAN Way’ that emerged from the events of Cyclone Nargis provided a starting point from which to work more effectively in coordinating efforts through proactive mediation, consensus and trust rather than militarism and coercion.

In the aftermath of the institutional engagement of ASEAN in the events of Cyclone Nargis, the ratification of the ASEAN Charter 2008 officially acknowledged ASEAN’s role and responsibility in protecting human rights in concrete terms with legal character. As Guiyab (2013: 8) notes, “nowhere in the 1967 declaration was human rights improvement listed as a goal, so its inclusion in the Charter of 2008, which was affirmed by all member states, makes it one of the first instances where the organization has officially acknowledged ASEAN as having a role in that field as well” (p.8).

The ASEAN Charter states the main purposes of ASEAN as such:

“[t]o strengthen democracy, enhance good governance and the rule of law ... to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms,” and “[t]o enhance the well-being and livelihood of the peoples of ASEAN by providing them with equitable access to opportunities for human development, social welfare, and justice.” (The ASEAN Charter, 2008: 4)

As Bellamy & Beeson point out (2010: 276):

“For the first time in the association’s history, the Charter sets out shared expectations about the proper role of states in Southeast Asia. According to Article 2 of the Charter, “Member States shall” show “adherence to the rule of law, good governance, the principles of democracy and constitutional government” (Article 2 [h]) and “respect for fundamental freedoms, the promotion and protection of human rights, and the promotion of social justice” (Article 2[j]). In the event of a “serious breach” of Article 2, the matter should be referred to the ASEAN Summit for a decision (Article 20).”

Moreover, ASEAN also, and for the first time, implemented conditions on its members to comply with its charter and human rights requirement which are to be legally binding (Arendshorst 2009). The new criteria for admission to ASEAN include things such as agreement to abide by the rules of the charter and the consent to carry out the conditions of membership (Bellamy & Beeson, 2010). ASEAN also requires its members to conform to international principles of human rights for the first time by demanding them to comply with the UN charter and the international humanitarian laws (Guiyab, 2013). These steps have precipitated ASEAN establishing its own Human Rights Body, the Asian Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) (Arendshorst, 2009). Nonetheless as Amador III (2009: 17) notes, “it is clear from the ASEAN Charter that member states, while granting the ASEAN a legal personality, have not ceded an iota of political power to it. Policymaking power resides with the ASEAN

Summit of heads of states/ governments, which is responsible for making decisions and addressing emergency situations.”

## **Hybridity**

Instead of taking the risk of remaining dogmatic to its old way with all the potential consequences that would have had on Myanmar and the region ASEAN managed to interfere without interfering and moving closer to the international way without moving away from its own way. The hybridity of the new ‘ASEAN Way’ reflects Armitav Acharya’s discussions on regional organizations’ fusion of foreign ideas with local ones. As Bellamy and Beeson (2010) note, “meaningful normative change ultimately depends on such a process. According to Acharya, it is a process of “constitutive localization” in which local actors determine the extent of norm diffusion and adoption in a process that is “evolutionary rather than revolutionary” (Acharya cited in Bellamy and Beeson 2010: 269).

In its new way of ‘interference without interference’, ASEAN successfully localized the meaning of R2P by implementing the international norm in accordance with regional norms (Bellamy & Beeson (2010). ASEAN gave R2P the meaning of shared commitment and responsibility rather than a ‘Trojan horse’ for military intrusion, extensive sovereignty violation and “external imposition” (Bellamy & Beeson, 2010: 276). Its peaceful interference with the state’s consent, made Myanmar and the international community its allies of peace rather than adversaries. It intelligently negotiated between two very different ways by moving towards non-indifference rather than extreme interference or complete difference as its old way used to be (Amador III,

2009). ASEAN was, as a result, able to successfully and productively fuse between two old non-beneficial styles, each with its own pros and cons. It successfully took the pros of each way and made them part of its own new way. According to s Bent & Langmore (2011: 59) the new 'ASEAN Way' "provides an encouraging model for future R2P situations".

Finally, and as explained earlier, the new ASEAN way managed to create a hybrid between two extremes of full interference and extreme indifference. The new ASEAN way approaches interference as a constructive and peaceful way of engagement through negotiation, mediation, coordination. This involves trust and confidence building and associated supervision with the consent of the state. As Bellamy & Beeson (2010: 275) note, "ASEAN's response to the post-Nargis crisis suggests that the region no longer regards sovereignty as a blanket justification for whatever the state chooses to do to its own population. Rather, in the activism shown by both the Secretariat and a number of governments was an implicit understanding that sovereigns have certain responsibilities and that among those responsibilities is a duty to facilitate, or at least permit, the delivery of humanitarian assistance .... The region's response does indicate the tentative emergence of a new conception of responsible sovereignty." This can be seen from the way ASEAN dealt with the Myanmar Cyclone by interfering peacefully through mediation and state consensus.

## Conclusion

As a result of the Myanmar Cyclone Nargis R2P crisis and the pressure it put on ASEAN, ASEAN managed to successfully create a new praxis that mixes both Eastern and Western normative values. As a result, the new ‘ASEAN Way’ has made evolving notions of responsibility to protect and sovereign responsibility “compatible with established regional norms such as noninterference and consensus decision making” (Bellamy & Beeson, 2010: 275). In other words, as this paper maintains, ASEAN’s involvement in the Cyclone Nargis R2P crisis brought transformation to the ASEAN Way by way of mediation, action and hybridity. According to the Secretary General of ASEAN Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, Cyclone Nargis “baptized ASEAN” and gave birth to “a new ASEAN ready to take on responsibilities” (Thaindian News 2008). Cyclone Nargis proved to be both a crisis and an opportunity. As a result, ASEAN was able to redefine R2P in keeping with regional norms. In short, we can say that ASEAN’s old rhetoric and anthem now makes more sense given its achievement in the Cyclone Nargis R2P crisis: *dare to raise its flag high, sky high, embrace the pride in its heart, bonded as one look – in – out-ward to the world. For peace was its goal from the start and prosperity to last. ASEAN dared to dream and cared to share.*

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