



Photo credit: Palestine Red Crescent Society / Raed Al-Sharif

We are pleased to bring you the tenth issue of Beyond Relief!

In our **Feature Article**, Ms Lim Junli discusses the recent upheaval at USAID and its impacts on the humanitarian sector in Southeast Asia.

This issue's **On the Ground** features some of the initiatives and projects that members of the Singapore Humanitarian Network (SHN) have been participating in. It also features a snapshot of the monthly gatherings of the SHN.

Our members from the academic community have also been keeping themselves busy. This issue includes highlights of an edited book, several commentaries and three journal articles,

covering a diverse range of topics including humanitarian diplomacy, and disaster policy in Southeast Asia.

In the Spotlight features the upcoming Humanitarian Forum, and Fair organised by CHARIS. The forum will showcase expert speakers, uplifting music, and networking opportunities, catering to all levels of interest in humanitarian work.

Finally, we welcome your ideas, feedback and input and look forward to supporting joint efforts in research, networking and knowledge sharing. Do get in touch with either Nanthini (isnanthini@ntu.edu.sg) or Al (iscook@ntu.edu.sg).



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US FOREIGN AID: WHAT HAPPENED TO THE GRAND BARGAIN?

By **Lim Junli**, Research Fellow, HADR Programme, NTS Centre, RSIS



Photo credit: USAID Indonesia/ Wikimedia

President Trump's onslaught of executive orders, while aiming to re-orient the U.S. government, has disoriented much of the world. The order to pause foreign aid pending a 90-day review has upended the humanitarian sector; not least the direct recipients of aid. Humanitarian organisations have since scrambled to ascertain whether they qualify for a waiver and/or seek alternative sources of funding.

In Asia, the [United States Agency for International Development \(USAID\)](#) had at least 15 bilateral missions. More than a third of these missions are in Southeast Asia, a region highly prone to natural and human-induced hazards. USAID stop-work orders have severely impacted remote and vulnerable communities across the Southeast Asian region which received [USD \\$860 million](#) last year.

The Philippines alone received over 20% of total funds allocated to the region, including USAID response and recovery support following a series of devastating typhoons in 2024.

[De-mining](#) efforts in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia have also come to a halt—this includes clearing unexploded American ordnance, a legacy of the Vietnam War.

Healthcare centres along the Thai-Myanmar border dedicated to refugees have similarly

been forced to stop or severely limit their services disrupting proper and continued healthcare to thousands.

Less talked about are security concerns for humanitarian workers, particularly those operating in highly sensitive and politicised contexts. As countries in Asia continue to [tighten regulations around foreign funding](#), humanitarian organisations and other not-for-profit entities have had to resort to novel ways of maintaining funds and continued operations.

An abrupt stop to their work reveals their source of foreign funding and may place them in potential harm's way especially if the operating environment is hostile towards American funding. Furthermore, cessation of funds from the world's single largest humanitarian donor not only results in immediate harm to human life but sets in motion longer-term repercussions across a myriad of sectors including education, environment, and the rule of law as civil society initiatives are withdrawn.

Yet, crisis often proffers fertile ground for innovation and change. In January 2016, the UN High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing published its report, [Too important to fail—addressing the humanitarian financing gap](#), providing the basis for the 2016 Grand Bargain negotiations.

Among its key recommendations were to shrink needs by integrating crisis response into development financing and approaches towards local resilience; expanding the donor base to engage new and non-traditional funders; and improving efficiency of humanitarian assistance.

Critically, genuine localisation is needed to achieve these. The Grand Bargain thus committed donors and organisations to providing 25% of funding to local and national responders by 2020. Despite two reviews in 2021 and 2023, however, this target was [far from realised](#). In fact, funding towards local and national stakeholders drifted further from the original 2016 commitment, dipping from 3.4% in 2016 to 1.8% in 2022.

If anything, the pausing of US foreign aid has served to highlight the importance of the commitments made at the Grand Bargain. President Trump's order may have sent shockwaves, but it may have also served to jolt into action a community that has for too long talked about transformative change. As the saying goes, there is no time like the present.

INSIGHTS FROM THE 2024 AIRLINK APAC LOGISTICS PREPAREDNESS WORKSHOP

By **Claire Leow**, Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific, Airlink

For the past two years, Airlink has hosted regional training for logistics preparedness to help build capacity for rapid disaster response in a region prone to natural disasters raging from earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, cyclones, monsoon surges and health systems failures.

Due to the size of the region, we focused on sub-regions to gather the right level of knowledge and information-sharing to be effective, starting with Southeast Asia in 2023 and North Asia in 2024. As we head into 2025 with a focus on the Pacific, Airlink helped the Pacific Island Association of Non-Government Organisations (PIANGO), as a member of the Steering Committee of FALE Pasifika, its operational unit, to have a week-long workshop in Papua New Guinea in November 2024.

Airlink's Regional Response Framework: Enhancing Regional Coordination

The workshop is rooted in Airlink's Regional Response Framework, which emphasizes the importance of preparedness and coordination among humanitarian actors. Asia and the Pacific present unique challenges due to the diversity and geographic dispersion, making collaboration essential. By bringing together key players in the humanitarian sector, the workshop facilitated the sharing of best practices, enabling organizations to navigate the complexities of disaster logistics better. Importantly, new connections were made to forge more collaboration ahead.

Taiwan was chosen as the host location due to its communities' deep understanding of resilience, given their frequent exposure to cyclones, earthquakes, and monsoons. This setting provided an ideal backdrop for discussing the region's specific needs and developing tailored strategies for humanitarian response. (In fact, shortly after we left, the Hualien earthquake occurred and demonstrated the resilience of our local partner, the Buddhist Tzu Chi Foundation, and reinforced lessons just newly learned on structuring a rapid response.)

Key Learning Objectives and Outcomes

The workshop focused on enhancing logistical preparedness, particularly in transporting humanitarian supplies and personnel. Interactive sessions allowed participants to explore lessons learned from past responses and identify areas for improvement. A significant highlight was the session on Airlink's Air Logistics Preparedness Guidance Note, a ten-step guide designed to help NGOs prepare for emergency aid shipments, including the often complex documentation required for cargo movement.

Participants also discussed best practices for deploying humanitarian responders and supporting their mental health, a critical aspect of effective disaster response. We emphasized the importance of developing strong, formalized partnerships with local organizations and communities to ensure aid is appropriate to local needs and supports local economies rather than disrupting them.

Successes, Challenges, and the Path Forward

One of the workshop's successes was the deepened collaboration among participants, which highlighted the potential for joint funding and the benefits of formalizing partnerships before disasters strike. However, challenges remain, particularly in avoiding duplication of efforts and ensuring efficient communication during emergencies. Many NGOs recognized the need for better information sharing and collaboration to overcome these challenges. The workshop also underscored the importance of local procurement as a means of supporting regional economies during disasters. By developing procurement guidelines that balance local and international sourcing, organizations can mitigate the negative economic impacts of flooding local markets with imported goods. This approach supports local businesses and helps stabilize prices, ensuring a more sustainable response.

(Subsequent to the workshop, Airlink joined the inaugural Asia Pacific Humanitarian Logistics Working Group led by the World Food Program in response to regional

partners seeking a strategic joint approach to the logistics of humanitarian aid through information sharing and coordination.

Looking ahead, participants of the Airlink training workshop agreed on several action points to enhance preparedness and response efforts. These include ongoing training for staff and volunteers, improving documentation and impact reporting, and increasing supplies' pre-position in disaster-prone areas. There was a strong emphasis on the need for NGOs to build relationships with local partners during non-disaster periods, enabling more effective and culturally sensitive responses when crises occur.

A Collaborative Vision for the Future

The workshop concluded with a call for greater collaboration and information sharing within the humanitarian sector. Participants expressed a desire for Airlink to coordinate in disseminating vital information and managing logistics, particularly in customs clearance and last-mile transportation. By continuing to foster these partnerships and enhance communication, the humanitarian community can better prepare for and respond to the increasing frequency and severity of disasters in the Asia and Pacific region.

The 2024 APAC Logistics Preparedness Workshop was crucial to building a more resilient and collaborative humanitarian response network. The lessons learned and connections made during this event will contribute to more effective and coordinated efforts in future crises, ultimately saving lives and supporting communities in their time of need.



Airlink leverages private sector partnerships to provide a network of 200+ worldwide humanitarian response NGOs with cargo and personnel deployment assistance. If interested in learning more about Airlink, please contact Claire Leow at claireleow@airlinkflight.org

ON THE GROUND

Singapore Red Cross Scales Up Humanitarian Assistance Amidst Ceasefire in Gaza

In response to the ceasefire that took effect on 19 January 2025 in Gaza, the Singapore Red Cross (SRC) scaled up its humanitarian efforts by committing SGD 300,000 worth of relief supplies in January 2025 to support the needs of affected communities. This latest tranche of humanitarian assistance included food parcels, hygiene kits, and medical supplies.

“Singapore Red Cross is glad that the ceasefire is now in place. This presents a crucial opportunity to scale up its humanitarian assistance to address the urgent needs of civilians affected by the crisis. Our focus remains on providing swift, life-saving support - ensuring that those in need of urgent medical care, psychological support, and essential relief will receive the help they need,” said Mr Benjamin William, Secretary General/CEO of the Singapore Red Cross.

SRC continued to collaborate with its Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) Movement partners, including the Egyptian Red



Photo credit: Palestine Red Crescent Society / Raed Al-Sharif

Crescent Society (ERCS) to ensure that urgently needed aid is being distributed to those in need. SRC was prepared to deploy an operations coordinator to work with our ground partners to coordinate SRC's latest tranche of contributions.

Since the onset of the conflict on 7 October 2023, SRC had been actively working with the ERCS to procure and deliver essential relief supplies - food parcels, hygiene kits, and medical supplies through the land borders in Rafah. During the ceasefire, the ERCS coordinated closely with state authorities to intensify aid delivery into Gaza. ERCS shared that the aid stockpiled near the Rafah crossing was prepared for immediate dispatch when the borders were reopened. This included the daily delivery

of 600 truckloads of aid and fuel during the first phase of the ceasefire.

To date, SRC disbursed close to SGD 1 million worth of relief aid through the ERCS. This included the deployment of an operations coordinator and an eight-person team to assist the ERCS with the relief operations in 2024. SRC will continue to work with the Movement partners to monitor the situation in Gaza closely and adjust the response according to the needs of the affected communities. Funds raised from the public will directly support the displaced Palestinian communities in Gaza.

Contributed by Singapore Red Cross

Singapore Red Cross Sends Humanitarian Aid to the Philippines

In response to the widespread flooding and landslides in the Philippines caused by Tropical Cyclone Trami (known locally as Kristine), the Singapore Red Cross (SRC) contributed SGD 50,000 in October 2024 to support the ongoing relief operations led by the Philippine Red Cross (PRC).

In addition, the SRC launched a fundraising appeal to further support humanitarian relief and recovery efforts for communities affected by the recent storms in the Philippines.

“The aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Trami has left a devastating impact across the Philippines, disrupting lives and communities. We will work closely with the Philippine Red Cross to assist the affected communities as they navigate their challenges,” said Mr Benjamin William, Secretary General/CEO of the Singapore Red Cross. “SRC continues to monitor the situation and stand ready to provide further assistance where needed.”

In the early hours of 24 October, Tropical Cyclone Trami (known locally as Kristine) brought torrential rains across the Philippines, leading to widespread flooding and landslides that impacted over 2.6



Photo credit: Singapore Red Cross

million people in 14 out of 18 regions. The cyclone also damaged critical infrastructure such as roads, bridges and power lines, leaving many communities isolated. In the hard-hit Bicol region and nearby Quezon province, at least 24 lives were lost, with the death toll expected to rise as flooded towns and blocked roads hampered rescue and reporting efforts. Further heavy rains and strong winds were also expected in some areas due to Tropical Cyclone Kong Rey 24 (known locally as Leon).

The Philippine Red Cross distributed more than 20,000 hot meals to affected communities and mobilised essential resources, including food trucks, two 6x6

trucks, boats and ambulances. To further support those affected, the PRC also established welfare desks, first aid stations and child-friendly spaces. In addition, PRC employees and volunteers provided psychological first aid and basic health care services to those in need. All employees and volunteers across priority chapters and the national headquarters office were on standby for activation to support response operations.

Click [here](#) to learn more.

Contributed by Singapore Red Cross



Humanitarian Futures Forum 2024 / Singapore

Humanitarian Futures Forum 2024

RSIS co-organised the 3rd Humanitarian Futures Forum (HFF) 2024 with the Changi Regional Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Coordination Centre (RHCC). Held on 29 October 2024, the Forum focused on discussions to strengthen support systems for policy planners and decision-makers with a focus on futures-thinking to better anticipate, prepare for, and respond to humanitarian challenges.

To learn more about previous iterations of the Humanitarian Futures Forum, please click [here](#).

Keynote Address by Christopher Lockyear



Click [here](#) to watch video.

Panel 1 "Humanitarian Impacts of Climate Crisis and Disasters"



Click [here](#) to watch video.

Panel 2 "Digital Humanitarianism"



Click [here](#) to watch video.

Panel 3 "Emerging Humanitarian Landscape"



Click [here](#) to watch video.

Operation Love Myanmar

Relief Singapore (RSG) has initiated Operation Love Myanmar (OLM), an informal coalition of Singapore-based humanitarian organisations and other stakeholders that is working towards a collective response to the Myanmar crisis.

Given the severity and scale of humanitarian needs due to the ongoing civil war and disasters like Cyclone Mocha (2023) and Typhoon Yagi (2024), securing safe and effective humanitarian access to conflict zones inside Myanmar has been very challenging.

OLM will collaborate with partner NGOs in neighbouring countries - e.g. Thailand-based Center for Sustainable Humanitarian Action with Displaced Ethnic Communities (SHADE) - that have the means and capacities to channel funds and relief items to affected civilians, through the support of local civil society organisations in Myanmar.

Organisations and individuals keen to participate in this collective response may contact Jonathan How (RSG CEO) at jon@relief.sg.

Contributed by Relief SG

Research on Aiming to Build Resilience to Concurrent Shocks in the Asia-Pacific

Dr Caroline Brassard has joined a research team at the Washington University on a three-year research program aiming understanding societal strategies to build resilience to concurrent shocks in the Asia-Pacific, and ultimately, to develop supporting public policies. This research is funded by the Minerva Initiative. The principal investigator is Prof. Michael Frachetti, and the co-PIs are Patrick Daly from EOS/NTU and Prof. Ezra Zubrow from the University of Buffalo.

World Meteorological Organisation Task Team on Social Science and Geophysical Science Integration

Since 2019, Caroline has been a member of the Research Board of the World Meteorological Organisation. As part of her role, she has become a member of the task team on social science and geophysical science integration until the end of 2025. The task team will identify gaps, challenges, and opportunities to advance the integration of social science and geophysical science in support of Research to Action, or R20.

For more information please contact Caroline at: sppcaro@nus.edu.sg
Contributed by Dr Caroline Brassard

Singapore Humanitarian Network Monthly Catch-Ups at Holland Village

On the 1st Thursday of every month, the Singapore Humanitarian Network holds an informal catch-up session at Holland Village in Singapore. Originally beginning as an opportunity to bring together members of the network, it has since become a space for the humanitarian community in Singapore to meet others working in the field as well as for those simply interested in humanitarian affairs. Since then, colleagues and friends working in the various organisations, agencies and inter-agency networks of the humanitarian system have taken the opportunity to show up month-after-month to eat, drink and chat with each other, sharing their experiences and lives.

For those interested to join these sessions, please contact S. Nanthini at isnanthini@ntu.edu.sg.



Singapore Red Cross Expands Humanitarian Response

In the wake of the devastating aftermath caused by Tropical Cyclone Yagi and the Southwest Monsoon that swept across Southeast Asia, the Singapore Red Cross (SRC) expanded its support to include humanitarian aid for Myanmar in September 2024. This came as part of a larger, region-wide effort to assist communities severely impacted across Southeast Asia.

The public fundraising appeal by the Singapore Red Cross (SRC) supported the relief and recovery efforts in Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), Myanmar, Thailand, the Philippines and Viet Nam.

- **Effects of Tropical Cyclone Yagi and the Southwest Monsoon**

The combined effects of Tropical Cyclone Yagi - one of the strongest typhoons to hit Southeast Asia in decades - and the Southwest Monsoon has left a trail of destruction in multiple countries. Severe flooding, landslides, and extensive infrastructural damage have ravaged multiple countries, resulting in over 500 confirmed fatalities across the region, with the toll expected to rise as search and rescue operations continue.

In Myanmar alone, the floods triggered by Tropical Cyclone Yagi have claimed at least 226 lives and displaced hundreds of thousands from their homes. The disaster has placed immense pressure on Myanmar's already limited resources, intensifying the challenges faced by the communities. In response, the MRCS has mobilised more than 300 volunteers to provide humanitarian assistance to affected communities in Naypyitaw, Bago, Kayin, Kayah, Mon, Southern Shan, Mandalay, and Eastern Shan. Humanitarian assistance includes evacuation response, first aid services and the distribution of urgently needed relief supplies such as food packages, hygiene kits, safe drinking water, life jackets, raincoats and medicines.

- **Humanitarian Aid for Myanmar, Lao PDR and Viet Nam**

The SRC contributed SGD 50,000 to support disaster relief efforts in Myanmar, working closely with the Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS). This funded the distribution of food, clean water, hygiene kits, and other essential supplies to the communities



Photo Credit: Singapore Red Cross

hardest hit by the recent calamities. Due to the pressing need for safe drinking water, SRC also delivered water filters.

This support for Myanmar built upon SRC's earlier commitment of SGD 50,000 each towards humanitarian aid for Lao PDR and Viet Nam. Announced on 29 August and 12 September 2024, SRC's support for the relief efforts led by Lao Red Cross and Viet Nam Red Cross was channelled towards restoring hope for those affected by Tropical Cyclone Yagi and the severe floods across Southeast Asia.

- **SRC Volunteers conduct Needs Assessment, support Relief Operations in Lao PDR**

SRC's three-person response team arrived in Lao PDR on 16 September 2024 to provide support in relief operations and needs assessment.

The team set foot in the province of Luang Namtha, where 40,000 people across two districts were in pressing need of assistance, and conducted needs assessment and relief activities in Thong Kua Village and Tavanh Village in the Luang Namtha province. In Thong Kua Village, the team distributed household kits containing blankets, mosquito nets and other household items. In Tavanh Village, the team demonstrated the use of water filters to the local LRC volunteers and the villagers, supporting access to clean drinking water. The team will remain in Lao PDR until 24 September. If additional support is required, SRC was prepared to deploy further teams to assist in recovery efforts.

Additionally, SRC successfully delivered 50 water filters to Lao PDR through SAF's Changi Regional Humanitarian Assistance and

Disaster Relief Coordination Centre (Changi RHCC) Humanitarian Flight. The water filters enhanced the communities' access to clean drinking water, further bolstering the resilience of communities in Laos.

- **Future Plans for SRC**

In October, SRC will mobilise another three-person team to Viet Nam to support early recovery efforts. Plans are underway to send a team to Yangon, where discussions will centre on enhancing joint efforts for sustained relief and recovery operations in Myanmar, with a focus on addressing both urgent and ongoing needs in the hardest hit communities.

Mr Benjamin William, Secretary General/CEO of the Singapore Red Cross, said, "The devastating impact of Tropical Cyclone Yagi, compounded by the Southwest Monsoon, has triggered one of Southeast Asia's most severe climate disasters. The loss of lives, including children and the elderly, and the mass displacement of communities has caused much devastation and heartbreak. In times of crisis, solidarity is our greatest strength. We have swiftly mobilised humanitarian aid to provide critical support to the affected communities, as they navigate the aftermath of this catastrophe. At the same time, we are working in close coordination with our sister National Societies across Southeast Asia to share available resources, and we stand ready to provide additional assistance. We hope the People of Singapore will rally behind our humanitarian efforts, and contribute generously to our fundraising appeal."

To learn more, please click [here](#).

Contributed by Singapore Red Cross

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

News Articles, Commentaries and Reports

From Vision to Action: Envisioning Quad-ASEAN Partnership for Regional Resilience

Keith Paolo Catibog Landicho
IDSS Paper
27 September 2024

Click [here](#) to read more.

Is the Indian Ocean Ready for Another Mega-Tsunami?

Alistair D.B Cook
The Diplomat
01 December 2024

Click [here](#) to read more.

Türkiye's Humanitarian Diplomacy: Global Response and Reciprocity

S. Nanthini
IDSS Paper
10 December 2024

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AI in Humanitarian Action: Understanding the Digital Divide and Humanitarian Principles

Andrej Zwitter and Keith Paolo Catibog Landicho
IDSS Paper
17 December 2024

Click [here](#) to read more.

Emergency Preparedness and Contingency Planning: Lessons from 2024 for ASEAN Disaster Management

Keith Paolo Catibog Landicho
IDSS Paper
23 December 2024

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25 Years of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Sustaining Regional Momentum

S. Nanthini
IDSS Paper
5 February 2025

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Journal Articles / Chapters/ Books

"Humanitarian Engagement with Myanmar in the wake of the 2021 Coup" in Journal of Asian Public Policy, 2025, pp. 1-16.

Alistair D. B. Cook, Ian Holliday, and Aung Kaung Myat

Click [here](#) to read more.

"Missing targets: reforming disaster policy in Southeast Asia" in Journal of Asian Public Policy, 2025, pp. 1-19.

Alistair D. B. Cook, Jonatan Lassa and Mely Caballero-Anthony

Click [here](#) to read more.

"Re-coupling security and rights in humanitarian engagement in South Asia: the example of Afghanistan". Journal of Asian Public Policy. December 2024, pp. 1-16.

Junli Lim and Elisabeth Wickeri

Click [here](#) to read more.

"Disasters and Humanitarian Action: Dynamic Shifts, Reflections and Anticipating Future Directions". Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2024.

Edited by Alistair D. B Cook

Click [here](#) to read more.



In this photo taken on Jan. 2, 2005, a village near the coast of Sumatra lay in ruins after the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami.
Photo Credit: U.S. Navy photo by Photographer's Mate 2nd Class Philip A. McDaniel

IN THE SPOTLIGHT



The Humanitarian Forum & Fair 2025: Igniting Change, Inspiring Action

Humanitarian Forum & Fair 2025 returns on June 14 at St. Joseph's Institution (Junior) with a refreshed format to inspire action, foster dialogue, and engage participants through discussions and hands-on opportunities.

What is Humanitarian Forum & Fair? The Humanitarian Forum & Fair is a two-part event comprising:

- 1. The Humanitarian Forum:** A series of talks and panel discussions segmented into three key sessions:
 - **Heart:** Centered on the passion and motivation driving humanitarian work.
 - **Head:** Providing insights into global humanitarian challenges and practical knowledge for tackling them.
 - **Hands:** Focusing on actionable skills and strategies, with opportunities for attendees to actively engage in humanitarian efforts.
- 2. The Humanitarian Fair:** A vibrant platform where CHARIS Member Organizations and partner organizations showcase their projects and volunteer opportunities. This year's fair promises a carnival-like atmosphere, featuring food stalls, interactive games, and booths where attendees can explore various humanitarian initiatives.

What's New for Humanitarian Forum & Fair 2025?

This year's event features a refreshed format, allowing attendees to personalize their experience by selecting talks and activities on the day. This change provides a flexible experience, allowing participants to choose activities freely without prior registration, enabling spontaneous exploration and a personalized, meaningful engagement in humanitarian efforts.

Humanitarian Forum & Fair 2025 showcases expert speakers, uplifting music, and networking opportunities, catering to all levels of interest in humanitarian work. Designed to inspire action and build connections, it empowers attendees to learn, engage, and contribute to positive change.

Join CHARIS on June 14, 2025, at St. Joseph's Institution (Junior) for a day of inspiration, learning, and action.

For more information, please visit CHARIS Events or email Mervyn Lim at Mervyn.lim@charis-singapore.org.

