

Myanmar Cyclone Situation Report

Updated June 30, 2008

Overview

It has been two months since Cyclone Nargis struck Myanmar (formerly Burma) with winds of 120 miles (190 kilometers) per hour, sending the sea surging as much as 12 feet (3.5 meters).

Damage and Response

Major damage was reported in affected areas, particularly in the low-lying delta region, where the cyclone's impact was compounded by a storm surge. Nargis could be the world's deadliest natural disaster since the tsunami of 2004. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated the number of affected persons to be 2.4 million. Official government figures report the cyclone left nearly 134,000 people dead or missing. Unofficial figures are considerably higher.

Preliminary estimates indicate that 1.3 million of the estimated 2.4 million people affected have been reached with some assistance by International Non Governmental Organizations (INGOs), the Red Cross, and the UN. Some 14,000 Metric Tons of World Food Program (WFP) food assistance has been delivered to affected areas and WFP estimates that it has reached a total of approximately 596,000 beneficiaries with varying rations and cash assistance. Additionally, a total of 915 tons of Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement relief supplies had arrived in Yangon by air as of June 8. A Tripartite Core Group consisting of high-level representatives of the Government of Myanmar, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the UN was established at the donor conference on May 25 to oversee the coordination of relief assistance.

Nonetheless, a large number of villages still have not received any support from the UN, INGOs, or the Red Cross. Relief supplies and aid workers sent by foreign governments continue to get rejected by the local government, including materials from the US Navy, which sailed back from Myanmar with undelivered supplies on Thursday, June 5. This phenomenon has only furthered the crucial relief role being played by local and international NGOs in collaboration with local communities, bilateral sources, and the Government itself.

The greatest needs on the ground continue to include shelter, food, water, and medical assistance. Ninety-five percent of the homes in the delta region were destroyed. The U.N. children's agency, UNICEF, said more than 4,000 basic schools were either damaged or destroyed, affecting 1.1 million students, according to government figures. No significant epidemics of disease have been reported to date.

In the less affected areas of Irrawaddy Delta, camps temporarily housing displaced populations have started to decline as people return to home villages after receiving basic relief commodities and food assistance, according to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). However, on the outskirts of Laputta township, IFRC reports an increase in the number of new camps housing mainly women and children, as men return to villages to protect remaining livelihoods and erect provisional shelter.

JDC Response

JDC continues to collect and distribute funds to directly assist cyclone victims on a non-sectarian basis by working with a network of established local and international NGOs.

To respond to the catastrophe both immediately and in the longer-term, JDC:

- Continues to assist with assessment and distribution of relief supplies in remote areas in the delta and the islands west of Laputta in coordination with Karym Baptist Convention, World Concern, MASHAV, Israel Flying Aid, Latet, The Israel Forum for International Humanitarian Aid (IsraAid), and Fast Israel Rescue and Search Teams (F.I.R.S.T.). To date, JDC has supported the delivery of aid to over 2400 families in a dozen villages in the delta region.
- Coordinates efforts to distribute food through Pact, an NGO that provides microfinance loans and has developed a broad network of organizations throughout the devastated region. Having worked in Myanmar for the past 10 years, Pact is distributing food and medicine in the worst-hit areas surrounding the Irrawaddy Delta. JDC's representative on the ground is monitoring the operation.
- Coordinates efforts with Civic Society Initiative (CSI), a civic society networking organization which focuses on medical assistance, education, and civic awareness and voluntary activity. JDC has supported CSI in its deliveries of immediate relief and assistance, which have included distributions of tarpaulin, rice, clothes, candles, mosquito nets, soap, cooking pans, blankets, and drinking water to villages throughout the delta. In addition, CSI has coordinated medical assistance by three doctors to over 140 patients who have suffered from hypertension, insomnia, chest infection, and in some cases trauma.
- Distributed 10 tons of water chlorination pills throughout the delta region.
- Supported volunteers from Latet, an Israeli Humanitarian Aid NGO, working in the delta region to provide humanitarian assistance.
- Supported four doctors from F.I.R.S.T. and four members of Israel Flying Aid (both members of IsraAID) as well as an initial shipment of 10 tons of medication and medical supplies which were distributed by the Myanmar Red Cross; Israeli volunteers from Latet; and workers from Malteser, a German NGO working in Laputta. The Israel Flying Aid team was in Myanmar immediately after the disaster and has since returned to Israel. This initial response was featured in a televised report by Al Jazira.
- Supported F.I.R.S.T. in adopting a village with over 1000 people whom they are now supporting with Government permission.
- Supporting CSI in building a new school with latrines to provide education to 150 orphans. CSI will conduct teacher training for the school's educators and equip the school with all necessary supplies.
- Planning a long-term development program with partners in Sri Lanka, India, and Turkey.
- Working with the International Blue Crescent to develop a project for implementation by the local Muslim NGO partner.

Jewish Needs

JDC met with the Jewish community's leader and assessed the damage. JDC representatives reported that the roof of the synagogue has been completely destroyed and will need replacement. Five of the eight Jews in Yangon lost their homes; one is currently residing near the synagogue and the others are living with friends and neighbors. JDC has committed to provide assistance for the synagogue renovations, which have already begun, as well as to the members of the community in need. JDC has supported the purchase of a generator for the local Jewish community and the distribution of water purification tablets and systems to members of the community.