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PACIFIC DISASTER MANAGEMENT INFORMATION NETWORK (PDMIN)
1 Jarrett White Road MCPA-DM • Tripler AMC, HI 96859-5000
Telephone: 808.433.7035 • 808.433.1757
PDMIN@coe-dmha.org • <http://coe-dmha.org/apdr>

**Cyclone Nargis Update
May 5, 2008**



Current Status

Tropical Cyclone Nargis struck southwestern Myanmar (Burma) at around 16:00 Friday (May 2) local time, packing sustained winds of 120 mph (190 kph). Myanmar's official state-run media reported the death toll Monday (May 5) at

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3,934 people, with 41 injured and 2,879 missing. Myanmar's Foreign Minister has unofficially put the death toll at higher than 10,000 and media sources have cited government agencies as saying the toll is around 15,000. The UN says hundreds of thousands of people have been left homeless in the countryside while the country's main city and former capital, Yangon (Rangoon), was devastated by the storm.

Nargis touched down in Irrawaddy Division, about 155 miles (250 km) southwest of Yangon. The Irrawaddy towns of Bogalady, Laputta and Patanaw were reported destroyed. The Irrawaddy delta is the country's major rice-producing area and officials anticipate extensive damage to crops. After making landfall, the storm passed directly over Yangon late Friday night local time, causing widespread destruction to buildings and infrastructures. It then tracked toward the northeast on Saturday (May 3), skirting northwestern Thailand before dissipating in Myanmar's Mon state. Yangon, Irrawaddy Division, Bago (Pegu) Division, Kayin (Karen) state and Mon state have all been declared disaster zones. Twenty-four million of the country's 53 million people live in those five regions. Some 6 million live in Yangon.

Myanmar's ruling elite has said that it will welcome international aid, although it is not clear whether it has accepted the pending UN disaster relief mission. The UN says that it appears at this stage that the assistance envisaged is primarily bilateral, with aid going directly to the government relief agencies.

Plastic sheeting, water purification tables, cooking sets, mosquito nets, emergency health kits, food and fuel are all considered urgent needs.

A UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) Team has been dispatched and members were assembling and meeting in Bangkok, Thailand, on Monday. Terje Skavdal, regional director of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), headed the meeting and said the operation was being based out of Thailand because the UN support system inside Myanmar is insufficient. Due to blocked roads, flooding and downed communication and electricity lines, UNOCHA says it is difficult to assess the extent of damages, especially outside of Yangon.

In a statement Sunday (May 4), UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed his sympathy for those affected by Nargis and said in addition to the UNDAC team, the UN was prepared to offer necessary assistance.

Authorities are concerned over profiteering in the aftermath of the storm, with prices of food, fuel and building supplies already having risen about 300 percent, according to the Associated Press. Like other Asian nations, Myanmar had already been affected by the rising global price of rice.

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Myanmar officials said Monday that a constitutional referendum scheduled for Saturday (May 10) will go ahead as planned, despite the cyclone's devastation. Myanmar has been ruled by the military since 1962. The junta has refused to allow international observers to monitor the election and many analysts and opposition members have dismissed the document as a sham designed to entrench military rule.

Impact

Sunday's death toll had been reported at just 351, but aid workers and officials are beginning to gain access to some of the devastated rural areas and by Monday, the official toll was 3,934 dead. Foreign Minister Nyan Win has said the death toll is easily 10,000. Some media outlets cited official sources as saying the death toll had risen to 15,000 by Monday evening local time, but the reports could not be verified. The UN also says that there may be more than 3,000 missing in Irrawaddy Division alone. The UN says several hundred thousand are estimated to be without shelter and safe drinking water.

Although the UN reports that hundreds of thousands of homes were destroyed, there is no official estimate of the number of people displaced by Nargis. Thousands of people in Yangon, a city of about 6 million, are reportedly camping out in government school buildings. Authorities closed the city's one airport because of damage and flooding. The government has said about 98,000 people were made homeless on Haing Gyi island in the Irrawaddy Delta. Moving inland along the delta, several sources reported that 95 percent of homes were estimated to have been destroyed.

According to the military junta, at least 57 ships sunk in the Irrawaddy River and dozens of smaller boats were also lost.

Electricity and communication lines were taken out in the storm and UNOCHA says it will be several days before either are repaired.

Officials say an insufficient supply of potable water will be a major problem as very little running water is available in Yangon. Without drinking water, health authorities fear the potential spread of water-borne diseases.

The IFRC, Medecins Sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders) and the NGO Christian Aid said their staffs were able to warn many people ahead of the storm. Warnings also ran on state-run television and in local newspapers, although local media say many people have access to neither.

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Despite initial fears, neighboring Bangladesh was not affected by Nargis. India experienced heavy rains in its eastern coastal states as the storm formed in the Bay of Bengal. Thailand reported five districts in Tak province along the border have encountered serious flooding conditions from continuous heavy rains. More than 100 houses have been inundated and over 1,000 left homeless.

Background

Cyclone season in the Bay of Bengal typically runs from May through November. Nargis was the first cyclone to hit the Bay since category-4 Cyclone Sidr struck Bangladesh on November 15, killing nearly 3,400 people and devastating the southeastern coastline. In May 2004, the junta made a rare request for assistance after a cyclone hit Rakhine state, killing at least 140 people and displacing around 18,000 others. Some casualty estimates put the death toll for the 2004 storm at more than 1,000. It was reportedly the worst storm to hit Rakhine since 1968 and carried sustained winds up to 100 mph.

Country Profile

Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, has a population of about 53 million and has been ruled by a succession of military juntas since 1962. It is one of Asia's poorest nations. The current junta, ruling since 1988, has isolated the country from the outside world, making it difficult at times to extract information about events taking place in the country. The capital city, Naypyidaw, is located about 240 miles (390 km) north of Yangon.

Many Western nations have imposed sanctions on Myanmar in protest of its alleged human rights abuses and a crackdown on peaceful pro-democracy protests in September 2007 in which at least 31 people were killed. Myanmar receives far less foreign aid - about \$US2.50 per capita - than regional neighbors Cambodia (\$47) and Laos (\$63) and below the \$14 average for low-income nations, according to Reuters.

Government Response

Myanmar Foreign Minister Nyan Win has said his country will welcome international aid.

The junta has so far pledged US\$5 million for relief. Military and police units have been deployed as part of rescue and relief operations

An Emergency Committee has been established, headed by the prime minister.

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The committee has declared Yangon, Irrawaddy Division, Bago (Pegu) Division, Kachin state and Mon state all disaster zones. The committee has also mobilized military and police units for rescue, rehabilitation and clean-up operations in the Yangon area.

Myanmar's minister of social welfare met with UN officials on Sunday (May 4) to discuss the terms of accepted assistance.

National Response

Myanmar's **Red Cross** planned to dispatch five assessment teams Monday to Yangon, Irrawaddy, Bago East, Bago West, Mon and Kayin. The agency is distributing 5,000 liters of drinking water to schools and pagodas where people have sought temporary shelter in Yangon.

International Response

United Nations

A five-member **UNDAC** team, led by Eliane Provo Kluit from OCHA, has been dispatched and is convening in Bangkok. The team is making plans for a relief operation in Myanmar, but it is not known whether the UN has received official acceptance from the Myanmar government to conduct the mission.

The **UN Children's Fund (UNICEF)** is deploying five teams Monday to assess damages in Yangon, Patheingyi (the capital of Irrawaddy Division) and Bago.

A **United Nations Disaster Management Team (UNDMT)** with assistance from an **Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)** has developed a cluster system in the country that shared information on preparedness levels last week. More information will be released after further meetings.

The **World Food Program (WFP)** has 500 metric tons of food stored in Yangon that it plans to distribute, along with generators stored in Cambodia.

A **UN Coordination Team** in Myanmar is examining the situation to determine whether to allocate money from the UN Central Emergency Reserve Fund.

NGOs / IOs

The **British Red Cross** has released US\$59,100 (30,000 pounds) from its disaster fund.

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Church World Service (CWS) is appealing for US\$50,000 to start its relief operations in Myanmar.

The **International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)** has released an initial US\$189,000 (200,000 Swiss Francs) to help with the Red Cross response in Myanmar. Red Cross teams are now on the ground assessing damages in all five affected regions of Myanmar. IFRC plans to release 2,000 shelters and 2,000 family kits. IFRC lists its top relief priority as shelter.

Malteser International is providing US\$15,490 (10,000 Euros) in assistance.

World Vision estimates that nearly 2 million people were affected by Nargis and has declared shelter and water the most urgent needs. It is appealing for US\$3 million in global donations to support its relief efforts. Initial supplies handed out will include zinc sheets, tents, tarpaulins and medicines.

Foreign governments

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has called on its member nations to provide urgent assistance to Myanmar.

India will soon send two naval ships loaded with food, tents, clothing, blankets and medicine, according to the Ministry of External Affairs.

The **Japan** International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is sending tents and generators to arrive Thursday.

Thailand has donated an initial US\$50,000 and planned to use C-130 aircraft to airlift nine metric tons of food and medical supplies worth US\$284,400 (9 million Thai baht) to its neighbor.

The **United States** has provided an initial US\$250,000 and has an emergency response team on standby. A State Department spokesperson was quoted by Reuters as saying that the Myanmar government had not given the US team permission to enter the country yet Monday. The US embassy in Myanmar has issued a disaster declaration in the country.

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