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Information bulletin

Myanmar: Inter-communal conflict

 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

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This bulletin is being issued for information only, and reflects the current situation and details available at this time.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation. The Myanmar Red Cross Society will, however, accept direct assistance to provide support to the affected population.



Myanmar Red Cross Society volunteers approach the situation with caution while conducting search and rescue operations in Meikhtila (Photo: MRCS)

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Summary:

Inter-communal conflict erupted on 20 March following an argument in a shop selling gold items in the Eastern Market of Meikhtila, around 150 km south of Mandalay in central Myanmar. Reports indicate a quarrel between a Buddhist customer and a Muslim shop owner escalated, leading to clashes that quickly spread to many parts of the town. In Meikhtila, a total of 12,846 people are estimated to have been displaced, including 9,563 now living in five temporary locations (i.e. three schools, one educational college and a football stadium) with a further 3,283 in local monasteries. According to a recent UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) situational report, up to 40 people have been killed and 61 injured in the fighting with an estimated total of 2,245 houses destroyed.

The Myanmar Red Cross Society has responded immediately to those affected by the clashes, in coordination with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), to provide search and rescue, first aid and referral services. Red Cross ambulances have also been used to transfer more serious cases of injury to local healthcare facilities. Local volunteers are participating in support of the inter-agency assessment team to ascertain needs and are working closely with local authorities.

The situation

Inter-communal violence began in Meikhtila Township, Mandalay region in the central part of Myanmar on 19 March when a couple from the nearby Pyun Kauk village, visited a gold shop to sell a golden hairclip. It is reported that an argument between the Buddhist husband and the Muslim gold shop employees escalated into a violent exchange, which left the husband with a head injury. This news quickly spread and aroused sentiment that has resulted in violence between the Muslim and Buddhist communities in the Meikhtila township. A Buddhist monk was reportedly among the first killed, leading to a mob setting fire to nearly 200 houses/shops, 13 religious buildings and the township education office. The media reported 32 people killed with many others injured.

On 26 March the inter-agency rapid assessment team - composed of Myanmar Red Cross Society, Action Aid, Association of Medical Doctors of Asia (AMDA), Cooperazione e Sviluppo (CESVI), Save the Children International, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNOCHA, and World Food Programme (WFP) - completed its assessment in all affected locations. The assessment indicates that in Meikhtila, a total of 12,846 people are estimated to have been displaced, including 9,563 now living in five temporary locations (i.e. three schools, one educational college and a football stadium). A further 3,283 are being sheltered in local monasteries. According to the most recent UNOCHA situational report to date, 40 people have been killed and 61 injured in the fighting with an estimated total of 2,245 houses destroyed.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Meikhtila – according to the Inter Agency Assessment	
Assessment locations	Displaced Population
Schools (3)	6,138
Educational college (1)	1,085
Stadium (1)	2,340
Monasteries (17)	3,283
Total	12,846

Signs of tension are also on the rise in other parts of the country. Isolated acts of arson were reported in Yamethin (65 km south of Meikhtila) on 24 March while sporadic arson attempts occurred in Okpho and Gyobingauk (Bago region) on 25 March. Local media has reported hundreds of people destroying one religious building and 14 houses in Zee Gone Township. Another religious building was also reported to have been destroyed by a mob in Minhla yesterday. The government has imposed a curfew in six townships of Bago region. Presently, a state of emergency remains in place for four townships in Meikhtila: Mahliang, Meikhtila, Thazi, and Wundwin, despite security now been restored with some markets and shops reopening.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS), with ICRC support, responded immediately at the first onset of violence in Meikhtila. About 32 local Red Cross Volunteers (RCVs) from the township were deployed to assist with first aid, restoring family links and referral services. MRCS is taking part in the inter-agency rapid assessment team to ascertain needs of the affected population and this assessment was completed on Thursday, 28 March.

Since Friday, 22 March, ICRC has maintained a permanent presence in Meikhtila to assess the situation and evaluate potential support for MRCS activities. This has included providing the MRCS Meikhtila district branch with logistics and communication assistance, such as stretchers, visibility equipment, IT equipment, VHF radios, fuel for ambulances,



Local MRCS volunteers providing first aid services to those injured in the conflict (Photo: MRCS)

mobile phone top up cards and per diem for the volunteers. On Saturday, 30 March, ICRC will also deliver 2,000 family hygiene kits for distribution.

As part of the immediate response, MRCS mobilized its disaster preparedness stocks which were provided by IFRC in December 2012. ICRC will replenish this emergency stock and stands ready to discuss any further support. On 30 March, ICRC will also deliver 2'000 family hygiene kits for distribution.



Local MRCS volunteers conduct search and rescue operations to assist affected people to evacuate to safer locations (Photo: MRCS)

Red Cross volunteers have remained at the scene, helping to evacuate families to safe locations and providing emergency first aid services. Red Cross ambulances have also been used to transfer more serious cases to local healthcare facilities.

Three RCVs from Yangon, trained in restoring family links (RFL), were deployed and have facilitated 100 safe-and-well phone calls and helped to re-establish contact among 16 families. MRCS in Yangon is also processing five anxious-for-news enquiries. The RFL team plans to visit all camps by 31 March. The Red Cross branch of Meikhtila, with the supervision of regional Red Cross branch, deployed two RCVs from Pyinmanar, four from Thazi, six from Wondwin and 20 more from Meikhtila.



Local MRCS volunteers assist in transferring an injured person to the hospital (Photo: MRCS)

In total, 32 RCVs have participated in the operation. Two RCVs were assigned to each camp during the daytime, and five RCVs at the township branch at night following a duty roster. As the deployed number of RCVs has increased, the MRCS headquarters has provided additional support materials including 30 helmets and 30 aprons.

On 28 March, MRCS distributed blankets and mosquito nets to 754 families of IDPs taking refuge in three monasteries and the district football stadium.

The MRCS headquarters released the following relief items from its warehouse in Yangon and Mandalay to assisted those affected, currently living in the camps:

Items	Unit count
Family tents	20
Jerry cans	400
Tarpaulins	200
Body bags/body bag labels	100/100
Solar lamps	50
Personal hygiene kits	35
Blankets	1,000
Mosquito nets	1,000
Hygiene kits	2,000
Dignity kits	1,500

The government has established a relief management committee that includes local and union authorities and is led by the Chief Minister of Mandalay region. The government is also providing food and water to the IDP camps and host communities are also providing support to those displaced. MRCS is supporting the Ministry of Health in providing health assistance to displaced people. UNICEF has provided 500 non-food item kits and 200 tarpaulins. Save the Children has provided 103 non-food item kits and plans to dispatch an additional 400 of these. UNHCR is providing family tents to those being sheltered in the football stadium. The relief and resettlement department of the government has set up a temporary office in Meikhtila to coordinate

the relief operation. MRCS, along with ICRC, is attending coordination meetings regularly to ascertain needs and exchange updated information.

Contact information

For further information specifically related to this operation, please contact:

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IFRC's vision is to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by National Societies, with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.



IFRC's work is guided by Strategy 2020 which puts forward three strategic aims:

1. Save lives, protect livelihoods, and strengthen recovery from disaster and crises.
 2. Enable healthy and safe living.
 3. Promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace.
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