

MYANMAR: FLOODS

9 September '97

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situation report no. 1

period covered: 1st to 8 September 1997

As flooding worsened, preventing people in shelters returning to their homes, a four-region assessment by a Myanmar Red Cross Society team identified emergency food distributions to evacuees as the most urgent priority. Initial funds have been made available and purchasing is under way, but the scope and effectiveness of the Society's operation will depend to a large extent on the rapidity of the response to the Federation appeal.

The context

Monsoon rains in Myanmar in July and August have caused flooding along the Ayeyarwady, Chindwin, Thanlwin, Sittaung and Yangon rivers and their tributaries. More than 400,000 people (80,000 families) are now affected.

Latest events

The flood situation in Myanmar shows no sign of getting better. The continuous rain, compounded by high tides, has prevented the flood waters from receding and forced those driven from their homes to remain in temporary shelters. Since the launching of the Federation appeal on 31 August, incessant rains in some areas have caused severe landslides which have left more people homeless. No details of casualties are available yet.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

The moment flooding occurred, the local Red Cross and government authorities surveyed the situation. They ensured that victims were evacuated and provided temporary shelter in camps. Emergency medical care was provided by Red Cross volunteers under the supervision of the local authorities. The volunteers also collected cooked food from non-affected areas and distributed it in the centres, along with clothing, blankets and other non-food commodities. The cooked food was gradually replaced by weekly rations, provided by the Red Cross and the local authorities, who also gave the Red Cross active support in the form of logistics and relief supplies.

The MRCS national headquarters have set up a disaster management team to oversee the relief operation. This team has prioritised the purchase and delivery of essential food items to flood victims in temporary shelters. Until the necessary contributions are received to the Federation Appeal funds allocated by the Federation from its Monsoon Appeal and the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) will be used.

An MRCS/Federation needs assessment team yesterday returned from a needs survey in Bago and Ayeyarwady Divisions and Kayin and Mon States. The team included the Federation's Regional Disaster Preparedness Delegate from Kuala Lumpur and its Representative based in Yangon.

The team was briefed in **Bago** by the Chairman of the Bago Division Red Cross Committee. More than 99,000 people (17,900 families) are affected in eight townships in the Division. Sixty-two relief centres have been established for evacuees. The team visited two of these centres. Their inhabitants, they report, lost their homes, animals and their rice paddies in the floods. The Bago Division is collecting information in order to establish a list of beneficiaries.

In a relief camp at Phayagyi visited by the team one third of the 287 homeless were children. A doctor from the nearby hospital assigned to look after health in the camp reported there were no cases of gastro-enteritis or water borne diseases.

In **Kayin State**, which is criss-crossed by eight rivers, six out of the seven townships are flooded, affecting a total of 21,399 households comprising 119,051 people. Losses to crops, agricultural implements, seeds and livestock amount to an estimated 90.8 million Kyats. Communications between Yangon and Kayin State were cut.

Mon State reported the highest number of casualties because it was hit not only by floods but also by massive landslides. There are 64 villages affected in 15 townships, with a population of 12,712 families, or 71,282 persons. During the period 21 July - 24 August, 48 temporary clinics were organised which became evacuation centres.

In its visit to **Ayeyarwady Division** the assessment team had to travel by boat to reach the flooded areas, where houses were still under water. The area is a river delta with approximately 200 branch rivers.

In one township visited, Kyunggon, 51 of 68 villages were flooded. The affected population comprised 4,089 households (19,553 persons). This township experiences serious flooding every three years and therefore was prepared to cope. Six evacuation centres were opened, with approximately 500 persons being sheltered, but as soon as the waters ebbed, they immediately returned to their homes.

In Thegon Village, 60 families are still in evacuation centres. Red Cross volunteers were most visible and active in managing the operation. In Patheingyi township 40 camps were organised in two areas.

There was no increase in gastro-intestinal illnesses because sources of drinking water were immediately checked and chlorinated, a process for which the National Society had taken anticipatory measures.

MRCS has already granted USD 5,000 each to the Ayeyarwady, Bago and Sagaing Divisions and Mon State. This should enable them to purchase about 350 bags of rice immediately and carry out the emergency phase of the planned operation.

Quotations for purchases to be made centrally are being sought in preparation for the procurement of bulk purchases once funds are forthcoming.

Outstanding needs

Since it appears likely that few of those currently in relief camps will be able to return to their homes within the next month, continued emergency food assistance is imperative. Those who have lost their homes will need help with rebuilding once this becomes possible.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The authorities have mobilised resources in the Divisions/ States to rescue, accommodate and feed the affected population. Provision of medical and sanitary arrangements in the temporary relief centres is being undertaken by the relevant government departments.

UN agencies and NGOs such as World Vision have responded to immediate needs in some of the affected areas.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The flood situation is not improving and land slides are adding to the number of those affected and needing assistance. The appeal needs an immediate response from donors to enable the MRCS to provide emergency assistance to those accommodated in relief camps in various parts of the country.

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