

# **MYANMAR FLOODS**

2 March 1998

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*situation report no. 2*

*period covered: 8 September - 31 December 1997*

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*The Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS), through its network of local volunteers, has provided food and clothing to more than 50,000 victims of flooding and landslides caused by unusually heavy and longlasting rains during the monsoon season last year. It is now providing housing materials to hundreds of families who lost their homes in the disaster. The MRCS was the only organisation apart from the Government able to provide relief to all affected areas of Myanmar.*

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## ***The context***

Heavy and prolonged rain throughout the 1997 monsoon season inundated vast areas of Myanmar, from August to October. In addition to 190 deaths and thousands of injuries, thousands of homes were destroyed by flood waters and dozens of villages buried by landslides. Many areas experienced repeated flooding.

## ***Latest events***

Flood waters in most parts of the lower regions of Myanmar were very slow in receding because of the continuing rains. Water levels rose and fell repeatedly throughout the flood affected areas resulting in new areas of local flooding and re-flooding of other areas. The wet period lasted until the end of October. Acres of paddy fields remained inundated and long stretches of roads were badly damaged in many areas. Many of those whose houses had escaped damage returned home from relief centres to find that damage to their paddy fields was extensive. Replanting began as soon as possible, but poorer yields than usual were expected. Landslides in Thanintharyi Division took 24 lives and destroyed scores of villages and livestock.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent action***

MRCS emergency relief support was prolonged as the continuing bad weather slowed the process of victims getting back on their feet.

MRCS National Headquarters was geared up to obtain regular feedback from RC Branches. Information regarding the effects of the flooding on villages along the Chindwin River in the Sagaing Division, and the Ayeyarwaddy River in Bago Division, as well as the landslide affected areas in Tanintharyi Division was collected by local Branches. The information collection process was slow due to the difficulties of communication in the affected areas.

Monitoring and field assessments were carried out on 17, 28 and 29 September, and in the first week of October. The assessment team was lead by Dr. Ko Ko Gyi, Honorary Secretary of MRCS. Other

members included the MRCS Deputy Director of Administration, the Information Officer and the Federation Relief delegate.

### **Bago Division**

At the time of the assessment visit the flood waters had gradually retreated and the majority of the families had returned to their houses. Those who lost their homes remained in the relief centres although some moved in with relatives and friends.

In Waw township (population 160,000), 80,000 acres of planted rice were destroyed. Drinking water stored in 400 ponds remained polluted.

Approximately 140 RC volunteers in Bago and Waw carried out continuous relief work to more than 10,000 victims at the height of the emergency. The assessment team prioritised the provision of rice and cooking oil to the victims. Other urgent needs were identified as powdered bleach for water sterilisation, seeds for paddy replanting and building materials to rebuild/repair houses.

The Division RC distributed 617 sacks of rice (50 Kg approximately per sack) to 3,727 beneficiaries. Altogether 9,800 pieces of clothing consisting of longyi and T-shirts for both men and women and children's clothing were provided to 1,400 families.

### **Mon State**

A landslide on 4 August killed 104 of the 513 inhabitants of the village of Saung Daing Gyi, NE of Kyaikto, when water collected in a natural catchment area poured down into the village. Due to the remoteness of the site, the tragedy was not reported to the authorities until much later.

The village has now been partially rebuilt on higher ground through the efforts of the villagers themselves assisted by MRCS volunteers. The paddy fields along the lower slopes of the hills, the source of food for the villagers, were destroyed.

The MRCS and the Regional Authorities supplied rice to the village. The only mode of transport is the bullock-cart and several trips a day were made over rough terrain. 7,638 victims were provided 524 sacks of rice and 630 litres of oil and 9,800 pieces of clothing were provided to 1,400 families. Building materials are required to assist 150 families identified as having lost their houses and in dire need. MRCS is in the process of purchasing and supplying these materials, but transportation to the location is proving difficult.

### **Tanintharyi Division**

Reports from the MRCS Branches documented the extent of flooding and landslides along the west coast of the Division. Three townships, 18 villages and three wards were partially or completely destroyed; 3,822 people were affected with 151 people missing or presumed dead. The MRCS assessment team visited the Division on 13 October.

The MRCS Branches in Dawei, and the townships of Laung Lon, Bok Byin and Ye Phyu Lewe carried out relief work under the Divisional RC branch co-ordination. 1,400 beneficiaries have been supplied with quantities of rice, oil and iodised salt. 150 families have been selected for assistance in rebuilding their homes and arrangements are being made for the purchase and distribution of housing materials.

### **Sagaing Division**

The MRCS assessment team visited Sagaing Division on 28 September. Of the 38 townships, 15 were affected by the flooding and heavy rain. About 150,000 people were estimated to be affected.

Nearly 10,000 RC volunteers were actively involved in the relief operation in all affected townships. Most of the victims had returned to what was left of their houses. MRCS has provided emergency

assistance of 294 sacks of rice to more than 3,414 victims. 1,400 families were provided with clothing assistance as indicated in the report on other States and Divisions. Arrangements are under way to supply housing materials to 150 families who lost their homes.

### **Ayeyarwaddy Division**

The situation in the Ayeyarwaddy Division seemed to have stabilised by the end of September, but further heavy rain raised the level of the Ayeyarwaddy River again to dangerous heights. By the time the waters receded many people had lost their houses and were staying with their relatives and friends. The Division Red Cross distributed rice, oil, iodised salt and clothing to more than 1,000 victims. No serious health problems were reported. Arrangements are being made to provide housing materials to 150 of the most vulnerable families identified by the MRCS Branch officials.

### **Mandalay Division**

A dam burst in this Division, flooding the township of Pyaw Bwe and damaging 350 houses. MRCS provided emergency assistance of rice to about 2,500 beneficiaries. Arrangements are being made to supply 150 families selected from among those who lost their homes.

### **Kachin State**

The Kachin RC branch provided emergency assistance of rice and oil to 957 families and 9,800 sets of clothing to 1,400 families. The RC branch has already identified 100 homeless families who will be provided with housing materials.

### **Kayin State/Magwe Division**

As reports came in from other States and Divisions, MRCS discovered that there were more States affected by the floods than originally reported. It extended its assistance to 2,100 victims in Kayin State and another 957 victims in Magwe Division. 545 sacks of rice and 800 litres of oil were supplied to the victims. As in the case of other States and Divisions 9,800 sets of clothing were provided to 1,400 families. In Magwe Division 40 sacks of rice and 80 litres of oil were supplied but no clothing.

### **Monitoring**

The distribution of food and clothing to the victims was monitored by Federation Delegates -- Regional Disaster Preparedness Delegate, Kuala Lumpur, the Federation Relief Co-ordinator and the Federation Representative, Myanmar-- the British RC Regional Delegate, and MRCS National Headquarters officials.

## ***Outstanding needs***

The emergency phase is now over and the MRCS has readjusted its objective to provide housing materials to the worst affected 1,050 families, selected from among those who lost their homes in the seven Divisions and States affected by the floods. Each of the States and Divisions, with the exception of Kachin State and Bago Division, is to receive materials for 150 families; Kachin State and Bago Division are to receive assistance for 100 and 200 families respectively. The materials, wooden rough dressed poles, split bamboo matting for walls and thatched roofing, are being procured from within Division/State areas and distribution is expected to start this month (February). MRCS is not planning any further review of needs.

## ***External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media***

MRCS is the only humanitarian organisation that has access to **all** flood affected areas of the country, due to its vast network of volunteers and grass root presence. Other NGOs have had access to limited areas, where they have provided emergency assistance.

## *Contributions*

See Annex 1 for details.

## *Conclusion*

The MRCS, with its vast network of volunteers and technical and financial support of the MRCS headquarters and the Federation, has been the lead non-governmental provider of relief to more than 50,000 affected victims in all parts of Myanmar.

The purchase and distribution of housing materials have proved difficult logistically because most of the materials for very remote areas have to be carried in by manual labour. MRCS hopes to conclude the relief operation and submit a final report by the end of March 1998.

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