

MYANMAR: MINBU TOWNSHIP FIRE

17 June 1997

Information Bulletin N° 1

The Disaster

On 11 May 1997, at 16h30, a fire broke out in Saku Myo, Minbu Township in Magwe Division -- one of the hottest parts of Upper Myanmar during the summer months. The fire, caused by an unextinguished cigarette butt, spread to neighbouring houses in the village. It took six hours before it was brought under control by the fire brigade, Red Cross volunteers and the local people. By then, a good part of the village had been completely gutted.

The fire caused the death of one monk, and totally destroyed one monastery, four rice mills, one oil producing factory, one primary school and 231 houses. Of the 1,126 people in the area, 245 are children. Out of 136 families affected, 121 were left homeless. Damage is estimated at Kyats 5,000,000 (USD 35,000).

This is the second fire to have caused damage in Minbu township this year. Magwe Division has had four major fires this year and the Magwe Division RC Branch was involved each time in providing relief assistance to the victims. Figures on the disasters are given below:

Date	Township/Village	Houses damaged	Households affected	People affected
13 Jan	Minbu/Kaing Taw Gyi	121	136	628
24 Jan	Pyint Pyu/Ywa Than Gyi	124	124	591
10 Feb	Chauk/Than Bin (North)	108	111	558
11 May	Min Bu/Saku Myo	214	231	1,126

Government and Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

After this latest fire local authorities immediately organised rescue operations and distributed a seven days' ration of rice to the victims, plus construction material and clothing. The authorities dispatched an assessment team to the affected area and rehabilitation activities are being undertaken based on its reports.

Apart from assisting the fire brigade personnel in fighting the fire, Red Cross volunteers helped the township health staff in providing health care for the victims. The local branch of the Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) responded immediately by organising volunteers to collect and distribute cooked food from the local community. The National Headquarters responded by sending five bales

of used clothing and 25 blankets to the local RC Branch. The President of MRCS accompanied by the Representative of the International Federation visited the affected area and the victims housed in local schools and the monastery.

Needs

About 100 families are housed in temporary accommodation and in need of external assistance to rebuild their homes, since the assistance provided by the government is not sufficient. The MRCS would like to purchase materials (thatch roofing, bamboo matting for walls and wooden and bamboo poles) to help them build their houses immediately. At an estimated cost of about USD 50 per house, a total of USD 5,000 will be needed.

When the schools reopen next week children will need school uniforms and books to replace those destroyed during the fire. The MRCS intends to assist 100 school children with these purchases, at an expected cost of USD 2,000.

Ann Naef
Acting Head
Appeals & Reports Service

Hiroshi Higashiura
Director
Asia and Pacific Department