

MYANMAR: HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

11 August 2000

appeal no. 01.26.2000

situation report no. 1

period covered: January - June 2000

The recognition of the necessity of reviving and strengthening solidarity between the Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) and PNS to help free the MRCS from its long-term isolation and of regional cooperation as a potent tool in enhancing the MRCS management capacity represents an important step towards meeting the objectives set forth in the Country Assistance Strategy for the year 2000 .

The context

Although rich in natural resources, Myanmar is the poorest country in South East Asia. The political isolation of the country since 1988 and the economic sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union have affected the country's economic development. The 1997-98 Asian economic downturn compounded the problem. An estimated 40% of the population do not have access to health services and roughly the same number lack adequate water and sanitation. The emergence of tuberculosis in rural areas and the spread of HIV/AIDS are significant health problems.

Myanmar is vulnerable to cyclones, floods and fires. In recent years, it has been conducting returnee programme for Rohingya people who have moved back from neighbouring Bangladesh to their home state Rakhine.

Latest events

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Latest events

The political situation for the Union of Myanmar did not change greatly in the first half of 2000. A series of political incidents occurred during this time, which attracted the attention of international communities in Myanmar and abroad. Following the siege of the Myanmar embassy last October, the

Ratchaburi provincial hospital, 60 miles west of Bangkok, was seized by "God's Army" and an allied group on 24 January 2000. The subsequent suppression by the Thai armed forces was widely noted, considering the political situation along the border as well as within Myanmar. The shift in the Thai government's policy towards Karen ethnic minority refugees became clear enough that the Secretary-General of the UN felt the need to make a strong statement of concern to the Thai government about the situation of the refugees along the border.

Various diplomatic suggestions and initiatives by the international community concerning Myanmar continued quietly during this period while the political and economic links with ASEAN countries were steadily strengthened through official exchange visits to and from Myanmar.

The first half of the year was marked by the following events: the newly-appointed Special Envoy of the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Razali Ismail, paid his first visit to Myanmar on 4 July; the "Chilston-2" meeting was held in Seoul to build on the current momentum to bring Yangon into the international community; the Agreement for Mekon Development was signed by Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Yunnan province, China; the Chinese government's positive stance on the development of Myanmar; and new economic/humanitarian assistance guidelines for Myanmar from the Japanese government.

The most welcome news for common Myanmar citizens was the raising of public servant salaries by 500 per cent effective from April. The minimum increase was 3,000 kyat and the maximum, 15,000 kyat per month. This was the first pay raise for public service since 1991. During that time, salaries had remained rigid despite an inflation rate as high as 30 per cent. Some are concerned that this will cause a price hike in fuel, commodities and services. The foreign exchange rate has already increased and at the moment fluctuates between 335-370 kyat/dollar despite the government's efforts to stabilise it.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Institutional Development (ID) •

Based on the recommendations of the review held in January and a series of discussions and meetings on implementation of the recommendations by the MRCS, a two-day workshop was organised and facilitated by the Federation Delegation in April. The objective was to make a Plan of Action for institutional development of the MRCS headquarters. The seven topics explored at the workshop, which was attended by the President, Executive Committee members and senior management staff (eleven in all), were as follows:

- (1) Strategic planning process and Strategy 2010 (See Annex 3);
- (2) SWOT analysis of the MRCS management;
- (3) Plan of Action and budget for the ID at the MRCS HQ, using a time frame;
- (4) New suggested organisational chart against the existing one (See Annex 2);
- (5) Re-structuring and designing the departments/divisions based on the new organisational chart;
- (6) Human resource development programme for the staff at the MRCS HQ;
- (7) Renovation of the working space.

Intensive discussion led to significant decisions. Firstly, a new organisational chart was proposed and accepted unanimously by the participants. Secondly, seven Executive Committee members were appointed as heads of the newly-established divisions. Thirdly, the current staff performance at the HQ management level was reviewed and it was proposed/confirmed that re-allocation of the present staff and employment of new staff should and would take place with new job descriptions. Fourthly, an ID task force was formed and it was confirmed that a Plan of Action and budget for the ID would be

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finalised as soon as possible. Lastly, office renovation was discussed as well as human resource development for the existing and new staff.

These decisions were presented jointly by the MRCS and the Federation Delegation at the Southeast Asia Partnership Meeting in Bangkok from 15-19 May. The Plan of Action and budget will be hopefully implemented starting from July. The Japanese Red Cross Society has pledged funding and other funds from a Japanese foundation are expected to support the implementation this year.

Southeast Asia Partnership Meeting in Bangkok from 15-19 May •

Good participation and exchanges within regional National Societies as well as from PNS were the most positive results from the Southeast Asia Partnership Meeting. It also seems to have made an impact on the MRCS and stimulated it to recognize:

- (1) the importance of formal/informal information exchanges on content/performance in the development programmes of the respective NS;
- (2) the importance of co-ordination/sharing process of CAS/RAS among stakeholders;
- (3) CAS/RAS as an effective marketing tool;
- (4) the existing types and diversity of PNS and other donors assistance for NS (Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos);
- (5) the necessity of reviving and strengthening solidarity between the MRCS and external PNS to help free the MRCS from its long-term isolation;
- (6) the potential of regional collaboration and co-ordination to enhance the MRCS management capacity through close communication and utilization of human resources.

There were also several positive comments on efforts made by the MRCS in the meeting; (i) continuation of developing the ID process, (ii) implementation of the health and DP review, (iii) steps towards development of an inclusive CAS, (iv) enhancement of information flow and “informal information” on the situation of Myanmar to the donor community. It is necessary to establish a sound solidarity between the MRCS and the PNS by endeavoring to set up an adequate system for information exchange and flow.

Community Based First Aid (CBFA) Training •

The CBFA training has been conducted in selected States and Divisions in Myanmar since 1996. There are two kinds of training courses with different manuals. One is Training of Trainers (ToT) and the other, Training of Volunteers. In May and June 2000, 33 CBFA trainers from various townships were trained in Eastern Shan State and 38 in Chin State. The training course focused on:

- (1) RC Movement in health care activities
- (2) Hints for the participants to be good trainers
- (3) Teaching methods
- (4) Needs analysis and planning for trainers
- (5) Micro teaching
- (6) Field visits and practice with field surveys
- (7) Prioritization of health problems for community training needs
- (8) Conducting CBFA training in villages
- (9) Feedback discussion on participants' experience
- (10) Presentation of CBFA training in the field

Through the course, all the participants were instructed and advised to provide CBFA training in a participatory way to the village RC volunteers or, if there were no volunteers, recruit RC volunteers in their local catchment areas to promote CBFA and upgrade community health status.

Compared with the First Aid training, CBFA training is relatively new and a challenging programme for the MRCS. The CBFA is not easy to implement at the grassroot level in a well-planned and sustainable way but it is an important and effective tool to assist vulnerable population for whom public health institutions are usually inaccessible. One community-based First Aid provider per village could be a

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good and realistic goal for future CBFA planning and implementation. In order for the MRCS to put this into practice, it needs realistic and thoughtful planning, more professional CBFA trainers, an effective/efficient monitoring system and closer communication among HQ, States and Divisions and Townships.

Disaster Preparedness (DP) and Response (DR) •

Since 1997, there have not been many large-scale disasters in Myanmar which needed external support from the international community. In June, a 7M-level earthquake was registered in scarcely populated mountains of northern Kachin State but nothing much was reported on the damage.

The MRCS has, nevertheless, quite a lot of experience with large, medium and small scale natural disasters like fire, flood and cyclone. The annexes 4 and 5 provide the type of the disaster and its seasonal trend.

Now that the Strategy 2010 has been introduced, the MRCS needs an overall review of its DP policy, strategy and current performance, focusing on the transition from disaster preparedness (DP) to community-based disaster preparedness (CBDP). The focal points will be development of the existing human resources, management capacity, contents of the CBDP programme and effective/efficient replenishment of relief goods stocked in the seventeen warehouses as well as alternative utilization of the warehouses under non-emergency circumstances. It is expected it will be done with a new DP Plan of Action in place within this year.

MRCS/UNHCR Integrated Assistance Programme for the Vulnerable Returnee Communities in Northern Rakhine State (EVI Programme) •

The year 2000 is the last year of the 5-year MRCS-UNHCR EVI (extremely vulnerable individuals) Programme. Implementation of the 5th year's activities since January are going as planned but the handing over process of the programme from UNHCR to the UN Integrated Programme (UNIP) has been very slow. One of the reasons is that the Myanmar government has not yet approved the UNIP replacement. UNHCR has decided to extend its presence after all for one more year, until the end of 2001, but the total programme budget for the year 2001 seems to have been drastically cut. Every NGO participating in the UNHCR Programme including the MRCS is very much concerned about this and are paying special attention to the handing over process at this moment. Having in mind the current situation, the Federation has suggested a separate Red Cross evaluation of the EVI Programme, a modified Plan of Action and focus on more specific and realistic target areas and other donors besides UNIP.

Health •

The MRCS and Federation will jointly conduct a health assessment from 26 July to 11 August followed by a planning workshop.

Other activities •

More than 132 RC youth members from 16 States/Divisions in Myanmar participated in the Annual Youth Camp for Outstanding RC Youth held in Yangon from 2-9 May. The programme included dissemination of the RC movement and its fundamental principles, leadership, FA/CBFA training, health issues along with demonstrations of various activities. The Federation Delegation had the opportunity to make a presentation of its activities in Myanmar in co-operation with the MRCS and ICRC. The government representatives were also invited for this occasion. On the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Day, a public meeting was held at the same venue attended by members of the diplomatic community, government representatives and local prominent RC supporters.

The MRCS RC Youth attended the International Youth Conference 2000 organised by the Australian Red Cross on 26 April-3 May in Melbourne.

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Outstanding needs

It is necessary and important for the MRCS to revive and strengthen solidarity with their donors and to reconsider diversification of potential funding.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The Federation Delegation in Myanmar regularly co-ordinates with the ICRC Delegation in Yangon as well as with UN agencies and other NGOs. The ICRC-Danish RC Primary Health Care (PHC) project areas in Eastern Shan State were visited in June. Information sharing and monitoring efforts take place regularly in the field as well as at HQ level. There was very good media coverage by both TV and daily newspapers in Yangon during the Youth Camp for Outstanding RC Youth and on the International Red Cross Day. The MRCS took this opportunity to disseminate their Red Cross message to the public.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
Operations Funding and Reporting Department

Hiroshi Higashiura
Director
Asia & Pacific Department

This and other reports on Federation operations are available on the Federation's website: <http://www.ifrc.org>

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