

# Burmese junta gets in some violin practice while death toll climbs

Sunday 18 May 2008, by [PETERSON Chris](#) (Date first published: 16 May 2008).

"Ten days after Cyclone Nargis, Burma faces further crisis as its military regime refuses to acknowledge the plight of its people", according to a statement released by seven pro-democracy groups in Burma on May 14.

"Aid has been so severely restricted that the Burmese people are now facing an outbreak of infectious diseases that threatens to overshadow the catastrophe of the cyclone. The military regime's response to this grave humanitarian emergency has been wholly unacceptable, and we strongly urge the authorities to give full priority to saving the lives of those at risk."

The organisations on the statement include the National Council of the Union of Burma; National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma; Ethnic Nationalities Council; Women's League of Burma; Forum for Democracy in Burma; Student and Youth Congress of Burma; and the Nationalities Youth Forum.

The cyclone, which hit southern towns of the Irrawaddy delta in Burma, an area which produces most of Burma's rice, left tens of thousands dead and missing. The survivors are now homeless and exposed to the risk of disease and possible starvation.

Despite the disaster, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) — the ruling military junta — chose to go ahead with its planned national referendum that aimed to entrench its power in all but the worst affected areas. The pro-democracy movement, both in Burma and in exile, have repeatedly called for the suspension of the referendum and to immediately allow all international aid and expertise into the country.

According to the statement: "Incidents in polling stations in various divisions and states show that the proceedings of the controversial referendum failed even to follow the Commission's own 'Referendum Law to Approve State Constitution Draft' ... [violations] included military being present at polling stations and those voting having their names and ID numbers recorded."

The May 14 Melbourne Age reported: "According to state television in Burma, the death toll is 31,938 with another 29,770 still missing. The United Nations says that more than 100,000 are likely to have been killed." Oxfam International has added that dysentery and cholera now threaten the lives of a further 1-4 million people.

Snake bites are also taking its toll as the flood waters send cobras and other deadly species into ruined homes on higher ground.

The SPDC is unwilling to let outsiders deliver aid for fear it might undermine its grip on power. The SPDC has said it is willing to accept international aid but not aid workers. As a result, aid has been accepted slowly and foreign aid workers turned away.

In recent days, small numbers of aid workers have been let in but are still restricted by the military. There are also reports of the Burmese military repackaging international aid and claiming it is a gift

from the junta's leader, General Tan Shwe or selling aid on the black market.

According to a May 17 AFP report, 43 members of the US House of Representatives argued for President George Bush to take advantage of the crisis to organise a "humanitarian intervention" — also known as a military invasion — of Burma.

The Australia Campaign for Burma is currently circulating a petition calling on the government to work to ensure that the humanitarian needs of the people of Burma are urgently addressed. Min Thet Naing, a member of the group, urged people to continue to give aid and get involved in the campaign. "Please give aid now and get involved as the victims urgently need it".

To donate and get involved, visit <http://aucampaignforburma.org>.

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**P.S.**

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