

Burma: Regime worsens suffering from cyclone

Sunday 18 May 2008, by [Burma Partnership](#) (Date first published: 7 May 2008).

Below is an abridged May 7 statement from the Burma Partnership Secretariat.

The extent of the devastation from the catastrophic Cyclone Nargis is slowly unfolding. In the state-run media it was reported on May 6 that 10,000 people were killed in Bogalay town alone in the Irrawaddy Delta region. The total death toll at this posting is at 22,464 people and expected to rise, while 41,000 more are missing. Up to a million people may be displaced.

People are in desperate need of food and drinking water. In Rangoon there has been no electricity since May 2 and hardly any organised aid work is seen on the streets yet.

It's reported that people are angry at the regime for not helping them in this situation.

The National League for Democracy (NLD) issued an emergency announcement calling for assistance from the UN and international community and also pledging that the party will join and cooperate in aid delivery to the people.

The junta has now said it would "welcome" international aid, but UN aid workers are reportedly still waiting for visas to enter the country. Supplies have been collected by different aid agencies to send to the disaster-struck areas.

Thailand has begun delivering emergency aid, starting this morning. The European Commission has released US\$3 million in initial emergency aid for victims. The US embassy in Myanmar issued a disaster declaration authorising the immediate release of \$250,000 in assistance. A US disaster assistance response team is standing by to, but the regime has so far refused the team.

Many Burmese living abroad are going back home to help out their families and others.

The massacre in Insein prison on May 3 has now led to even more deaths. Thirty-six prisoners were shot dead by army officers in a tumultuous situation that started as the prison roof was torn off by the cyclone. Apparently investigations were held with the prisoners after the situation was "brought under control" by the shootings.

Under interrogation, another four prisoners were tortured to death. Ninety-eight prisoners including four NLD political prisoners are locked in a punishment cell block.

Meanwhile the regime announced that its referendum [to introduce constitutional changes that aim to consolidate its rule] will be postponed in cyclone-hit areas. In all other places people are expected to go to the polls on May 10 as scheduled.

While people are at immensely suffering, the regime continues with its fierce "Yes" vote campaign. It has been reported today that authorities in Taunggyi and Kyaington in Shan State have begun its

pre-referendum “Yes” vote collecting from the people.

We have also received information that Thailand-based Joint Action Committee for Democracy in Burma has begun its pre-referendum voting on May 4 at Student Christians Centre in Bangkok, Thailand and collected ballots from migrant workers from Bangkok and others townships. At least 9150 “No” ballots were collected that day.

In the Philippines, Free Burma Coalition-Philippines (FBC-Phils) activists are organising a “Relief first before referendum” rally in front of the Burmese Embassy in Makati City on May 7 to demand that the junta allow the smooth entry of humanitarian aid and the immediate postponement of the referendum.

An FBC-Phils spokesperson says it is “improper and untimely” to pursue the referendum considering that the entire country is in mourning. FBC-Phils said the junta should instead give more focus to resolving the damages of the cyclone and allow “free movement” of agencies extending international humanitarian aid for the victims in the affected areas.

After the rally at Burma Embassy, FBC-Phils will march to Singapore Embassy to call on the Singapore government, current chair of the ASEAN, to extend help to Burma.

P.S.

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