

Cyclone Nargis Leaves HIV/AIDS Patients More Vulnerable

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Cyclone Nargis affected everyone in the Irrawaddy delta, but it has placed HIV/AIDS patients under even greater physical and mental stress, according to social welfare groups in Rangoon.

A youth member of Burma's main opposition party, the National League for Democracy, said many HIV/AIDS patients lost everything they had in the storm's aftermath.

"Our patients are desperately suffering with so many things at the same time," said Yazar, a youth member who is also an AIDS activist. "They are poor, and they didn't have anything more than daily food to keep them alive. Now they've lost everything, they do not have food or a place to stay."

"We are really worried about one of our patients in Dedaye, one of the hardest hit areas in the Irrawaddy Delta," he said. "She lost her husband in the storm. Her house was destroyed by the wind and now she is living with her child who also has HIV/AIDS."

He said some patients who lived on Hainggyi Island are believed to be dead, because they have not been heard from since May 2.

Speaking to The Irrawaddy on Tuesday, Phyu Phyu Thin, a well-known HIV/AIDS activist who has been in hiding since last year's pro-democracy protests, said HIV/AIDS aids groups have been contacted by more patients seeking help after the storm hit the country.

More cyclone refugees are making their way to Rangoon Division and the larger towns in the Irrawaddy delta seeking assistance, she said.

According to Yazar, the NLD group has provided food and medicine to more than 60 HIV/AIDS patients in recent days. He said the budget is not able to handle an influx of more patients.

"Problems are coming at us from many directions," he said. "We have limited resources, and as more and more people seek help, we're worried about meeting their needs in the future."

As a social welfare group with a broad awareness of the suffering of the people, Yazar said much help will be needed to rebuild the country and aid the homeless population.

"We especially need more knowledge and skills relating to psychological problems," he said, "because many people need help to recover from depression and mental problems after the storm."

The NLD-affiliated social welfare group helps care for more than 2, 000 people living with HIV/AIDS across Burma. About 50 patients live in two houses in Rangoon.

P.S.

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