



Referendum Must Be Called Off & International Aid Allowed In

For Immediate Release

The Seven Alliances of the Burmese democracy movement – a united front of umbrella organizations representing the majority of Burma’s ethnic and democracy groups in exile - today calls on the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) to suspend the referendum nationwide, and allow all international aid into the country immediately.

So far 35 disaster teams from 18 countries have offered to help and over 20 countries have pledged aid worth more than 40 million USD, but most of them have been denied entry to the country or are waiting for permission from the military regime to begin aid distribution. Even the United Nations assessment team has yet to be given visas.

Currently, thousands of dead bodies remain piled in paddy fields and the UN estimates millions are without food and water. Up to 40 per cent of the victims are believed to be children. Last night, junta officials approved a single UN aid flight bringing in emergency supplies accompanied by a disaster response team.

“So far the SPDC seems to be giving preference to aid delivered by its perceived allies. It must allow all international aid into the country immediately, especially teams offering much-needed international expertise. Failure to do so directly violates principles of humanitarian assistance and international agreements to which Burma is a signatory”, says Lian Sakhong, General Secretary of Ethnic Nationalities Council. “Authorities must allow local communities to work together to help each other, instead of harassing and intimidating them,” he adds.

There is a real risk of epidemics in the wake of Cyclone Nargis in Burma, particularly water-borne diseases such as cholera and diarrhea. For such conditions, simple, cost-effective interventions such as rehydration salts can reduce the risk of mortality from over 20% to less than 1%, especially in conjunction with provision of other basic services, such as clean water, food, and shelter.

The Seven Alliances points out that the delay in aid is contributing to what is already a catastrophic situation in Burma. “We urge the UN and the international community to carry out high-level negotiations with the leaders of the SPDC, to persuade them to open the country up and allow international aid teams unrestricted access,” says Dr. Naing Aung, Secretary General of Forum for Democracy in Burma. “If the SPDC continues to obstruct international assistance, then the world has a responsibility to respond to the life-threatening situation in Burma by invoking the ‘Responsibility to Protect’ clause, a concept the UN recognized in 2005,” he adds.

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Media Contacts:

U Myint Thein (National Council of Union of Burma) (087 808 3552)
Dr. Lian H Sakhong (Ethnic Nationalities Council) (081 029 6100)
Hseng Noun (Women's League of Burma) (081 884 4963)
Dr. Naing Aung (Forum for Democracy in Burma) (081 883 7230)