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campaigns, advocacy & capacity-building for human rights & democracy

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DISASTER

6 DAYS AFTER NARGIS, BURMA'S JUNTA CONTINUES TO BLOCK INTERNATIONAL AID

- On 3 May, the category three cyclone Nargis hits the Irrawaddy delta and Rangoon with wind speeds reaching 190 kilometers per hour. Over seven million people are affected by the storm.
- As of 7 May, the official death toll from the cyclone stands at about 25,000 with 41,000 people missing. The UN says that up to one million people are homeless. Other estimates at 100,000 dead, 1.5 million homeless, with 40% believed to be children.
- Despite knowing about the impending disaster, the regime fails to adequately inform people living in the areas impacted by the cyclone. The Indian Meteorological Department issued 41 warnings to SPDC authorities about the cyclone from 26 April. The area is traditionally vulnerable to cyclones. Exactly 2 years ago, Cyclone Mala hit the same area.
- Prices of food and other basic commodities skyrocket in the wake of the cyclone. Food is in short supply due to transport and communication disruptions. The junta says the situation is "normal" and plays down shortages but some commodities are already out of stock.
- The military regime fails to provide timely assistance to the cyclone victims. In Rangoon, hundreds of monks intervene and help clear the storm debris and provide victims with food.
- Despite widespread damage and a rising death toll, the SPDC pushes ahead with the 10 May constitutional referendum. The SPDC postpones to 24 May the vote in 47 Townships worst hit by the cyclone. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon Ban calls on the SPDC to postpone the vote nationally.
- Governments, UN agencies, and independent humanitarian groups rush to offer assistance for victims of the cyclone. As of 7 May, 24 countries have pledged financial support, with a total of \$30 million expected in aid.
- The SPDC responds to the outpouring of international assistance by delaying the issuing of visas to aid workers. The SPDC adds additional red tape and appoints a Minister to oversee visa applications. Six days after the cyclone hit Burma, aid groups say they are still waiting for visas to enter the country.
- Even as it says "No" to international aid workers, the regime continues to deploy security forces throughout the country to ensure a "Yes" vote. Meanwhile, 30% of the Army continues to wage a vicious offensive in Eastern Burma that displaced 80,000 in 2007.

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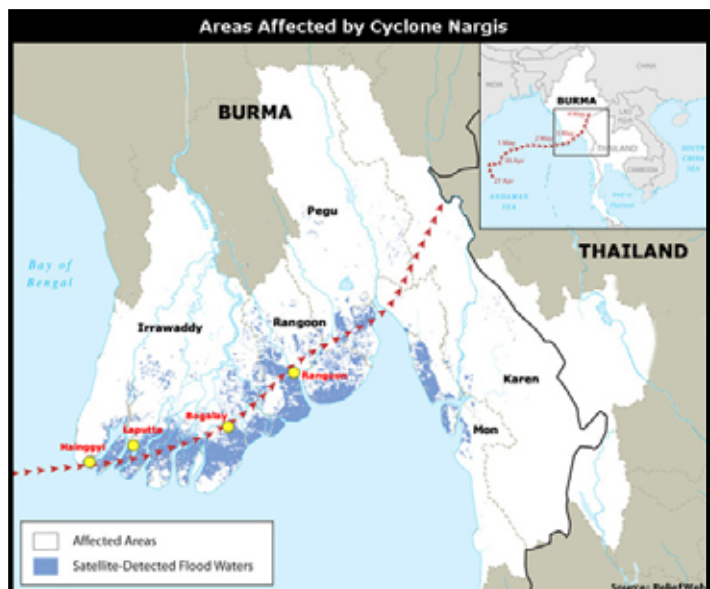
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Cyclone Nargis hits

On 3 May, the category three cyclone Nargis hit the Irrawaddy delta and Rangoon with wind speeds reaching 190 kilometers per hour.¹ Over seven million people were affected by the storm.²

The cyclone flattened and flooded entire towns. Bogale, Labutta and Pantanaw in Irrawaddy Division were particularly hard hit. It was estimated that 60% of Pegu Division was severely damaged.³ In Rangoon, the cyclone tore off roofs, uprooted trees, and knocked out electricity and disrupted water supplies.⁴ All flights in and out of Rangoon were canceled.⁵ Rangoon International Airport remained shut for 48 hours. Domestic flights were diverted to Mandalay.⁶ The internet was entirely cut-off.⁷ In Mon State, the edge of the cyclone swept Moulmein, while damage was reported in Thanbyuzayat and Mudon Townships.⁸ Several Townships in Southern Arakan State also suffered damages and telephone lines were down.⁹



The SPDC declared a state of emergency across five regions: Rangoon, Irrawaddy, and Pegu Divisions and Karen and Mon States. The total population of the disaster areas is around 24 million.¹⁰ The Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that 65% of Burma's rice, 80% of its aquaculture, 50% of its poultry, and 40% of its pig production come from these five regions.¹¹

Rising death toll

As of 7 May, the official death toll from the cyclone stood at about 25,000 with 41,000 people missing.¹² The UN said that up to one million people were homeless, some villages almost totally destroyed, and rice-growing areas wiped out.¹³ A senior US diplomat in Rangoon estimated that the death toll could be over 100,000, with 70,000 people missing.¹⁴ The SPDC initially reported that the cyclone killed 350 people.¹⁵ Save the Children, one of the few aid agencies allowed to operate inside Burma, said an estimated 40% of the dead or missing were believed to be children.¹⁶

¹ BBC Burmese Service (03 May 08) Cyclone hits Rangoon

² Irrawaddy (04 May 08) Number of Dead, Injured Expected to Climb

³ Irrawaddy (05 May 08) Junta May Seek International Aid

⁴ Irrawaddy (04 May 08) Commodity Prices Rise in Devastated Rangoon; Irrawaddy (03 May 08) Category 3 Cyclone Hammers Rangoon; AFP (05 May 08) Burma cyclone death toll tops 10,000: foreign minister

⁵ CNN (05 May 08) Myanmar death toll 'could reach 10,000'

⁶ AP (04 May 08) Cyclone kills more than 350 in Myanmar; Xinhua (04 May 08) Int'l flights to resume in Myanmar; Mizzima News (04 May 08) Rangoon airport closed due to signal failure; Mizzima News (04 May 08) Myanmar Television still down in Rangoon

⁷ Mizzima News (05 May 08) Internet likely down at least 2 more days

⁸ DVB (03 May 08) Burma declares five regions disaster areas after cyclone; IMNA (06 May 08) Cyclone damage in Mon State minimal

⁹ Narinjara News (05 May 08) Telephone lines still cut off in parts of Arakan

¹⁰ UN News Center (07 May 08) UN calls on Myanmar to facilitate aid delivery to cyclone victims; Irrawaddy (05 May 08) Junta May Seek International Aid; VOA (07 May 08) World Offers Aid to Burma as Cyclone Death Toll Tops 22,000

¹¹ AP (07 May 08) Burma's rice region decimated—food shortage feared

¹² Reuters (07 May 08) Myanmar cyclone toll nearing 22,500; AP (07 May 08) First international aid reaches Myanmar after cyclone; AP (06 May 08) Myanmar delta, where 22,000 died, isolated after cyclone; AFP (06 May 08) Myanmar says cyclone death toll tops 22,000; Bangkok Post (07 May 08) Cyclone Nargis death toll soars past 22,000

¹³ AP (07 May 08) First international aid reaches Myanmar after cyclone; UN News Center (07 May 08) UN calls on Myanmar to facilitate aid delivery to cyclone victims; AP (06 May 08) UN: Myanmar gives green light for aid; workers await visas; Independent (07 May 08) Aid agencies face battle to reach victims of the cyclone

¹⁴ CNN (07 May 08) U.S. envoy: Myanmar deaths may top 100,000

¹⁵ BBC Burmese Service (04 May 08) 350 killed in Burma cyclone

¹⁶ CNA (08 May 08) Myanmar survivors emerge desperate for help

SPDC ignored repeated warnings

Despite advance knowledge, the regime failed to adequately inform people living in the areas impacted by the cyclone.

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) issued 41 general warnings to SPDC authorities about the cyclone from 26 April.¹⁷ On 30 April, the IMD updated the SPDC every three hours about the cyclone, indicating its path, speed, severity, and the locations where the cyclone would hit land.¹⁸ The Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre in Bangkok said it also issued a cyclone warning to SPDC authorities.¹⁹

State-run media only released a cyclone alert on 2 May.²⁰ The New Light of Myanmar's "Storm news" section predicted "widespread rain or thundershowers" with wind reaching 110 kilometers per hour.²¹ State television warnings failed to tell people how to prepare when the cyclone hit land.²²

The SPDC also failed to send teams to evacuate villagers in the disaster-prone zones.²³ "Looking at the number of deaths, it leads us to think that an early warning system had not been put in place," said a spokesperson for the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.²⁴

A major catastrophe: UN

The UN described the situation as a "major catastrophe."²⁵ Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs John Holmes stressed that "any delays are going to be potentially critical" in the face of such a disaster.²⁶ If emergency supplies are not delivered quickly, it is feared that more people will die.²⁷ "Our biggest fear is that the aftermath could be more lethal than the storm itself," said a UNICEF official.²⁸ The greatest concern is over a possible spread of waterborne diseases due to lack of clean drinking water and sanitation.²⁹ Major concerns also include food shortages, respiratory illnesses among children forced to sleep outside, and injuries suffered during the storm.³⁰

Situation "normal" according to the SPDC

*"Where are all those uniformed people who are always ready to beat civilians? They should come out in full force and help clean up the areas and restore electricity."*³¹ – Rangoon resident, 4 May 2008

As of 7 May, there was still no electricity in Rangoon, the former capital. The water supply had been restored in only a few areas.³² The prices of food and other basic commodities had skyrocketed in the wake of the cyclone.³³ Food was in short supply due to transport and communication disruption in

Disaster in the making

- The SPDC diverts 40% of public funds to **military spending** but less than 3% to health and education, which has caused the collapse of human services.
- Burma has the 4th highest **child mortality rate** in the world at 106 deaths per 1,000 live births. In conflict zones in Eastern Burma, the figure rises higher (221 in conflict zones), compared to 21 in Thailand, and 205 in Congo.
- In 2007, Burma's **inflation** rate reached 50%. This was up from an already crippling 20% in 2006.

Sources: Back Pack Health Worker Team (Sep 06) *Chronic Emergency, EIU (Dec 07) Country Report: Burma, UNICEF (Jan 08) State of the World's Children*

¹⁷ Times (06 May 08) India says it warned Burma about cyclone

¹⁸ Times (06 May 08) India says it warned Burma about cyclone

¹⁹ Mizzima News (06 May 08) Burma knew of cyclone nearly a week before it hit

²⁰ Mizzima News (06 May 08) Burma knew of cyclone nearly a week before it hit

²¹ NLM (02 May 08) "Storm News"

²² AP (03 May 08) Myanmar warns of strong winds, high tides as Cyclone Nargis heads toward coast

²³ Mizzima News (06 May 08) Burma knew of cyclone nearly a week before it hit

²⁴ AFP (06 May 08) Myanmar says cyclone death toll tops 15,000

²⁵ UN News Center (07 May 08) UN calls on Myanmar to facilitate aid delivery to cyclone victims

²⁶ UN News Center (07 May 08) UN calls on Myanmar to facilitate aid delivery to cyclone victims

²⁷ Independent (07 May 08) Aid agencies face battle to reach victims of the cyclone

²⁸ AP (07 May 08) First international aid reaches Myanmar after cyclone

²⁹ AFP (06 May 08) Myanmar says cyclone death toll tops 15,000; Washington Post (07 May 08) 60,000 Dead or Missing in Burma; Independent (07 May 08) Aid agencies face battle to reach victims of the cyclone

³⁰ AP (06 May 08) WHO says Burma faces major health worries

³¹ AP (04 May 08) Cyclone kills more than 350 in Myanmar

³² AP (07 May 08) First international aid reaches Myanmar after cyclone

³³ Mizzima News (04 May 08) Gas prices spiral to all-time high

several parts of the country.³⁴ The junta played down food shortages by saying there was sufficient rice.³⁵ However, some commodities were already out of stock.³⁶ Some residents waited in line for hours to buy gasoline to fuel generators and cars.³⁷ People were unable to repair their houses due to shortage of materials in stores.³⁸ Looting was reported in some areas.³⁹

Rangoon residents said that SPDC authorities failed to provide timely assistance to the cyclone victims.⁴⁰ SPDC Information Minister Kyaw Hsan said military personnel were “doing their best”. However, in the immediate aftermath of the cyclone, SPDC Army soldiers were reportedly only clearing streets where top military officials resided.⁴¹ Hundreds of monks intervened and helped clear the storm debris and provided victims with food.⁴² State television showed a truck distributing water, though residents said they hadn't seen any water trucks around the city. There were no images of the hundreds of monks helping the recovery effort.⁴³ “The government is saying how they are giving rice to the people affected by the cyclone. They are lying,” said a man whose house was destroyed.⁴⁴ In the face of an escalating humanitarian crisis, on 7 May state-run television quoted SPDC Rangoon official Gen Tha Aye as saying the situation was “returning to normal.”⁴⁵

Despite the need to mount a massive aid effort, the regime continues to concentrate more than 30% of its troops in Eastern Burma to carry out attacks against civilians.⁴⁶ It was also reported that the regime resorted to **forced labor** to clear a road in Maungdaw Township, Arakan State, following heavy rains and strong winds that uprooted trees and telephone poles on 5 May.⁴⁷

Skyrocketing prices (in kyat, US\$1=1,100 kyat)			
	Before Nargis	After Nargis	Increase
Rice/kg	736	1,227	67%
Egg	300	400	33%
Pork/kg	2,761	3,067	11%
Cooking oil/liter	1,840	3,681	100%
Cooking charcoal	4,000	7,000	75%
Cooking gas 25 liter	20,000	25,000	25%
Pack of candles	500	1,000	100%
Gas/gallon	4,200	10,000	210%
Diesel/gallon	4,500	18,000	300%
Bus fare	200	500	150%

³⁴ AP (07 May 08) First international aid reaches Myanmar after cyclone; Irrawaddy (05 May 08) Cyclone could unleash political upheaval

³⁵ Independent (07 May 08) Aid agencies face battle to reach victims of the cyclone

³⁶ AP (07 May 08) First international aid reaches Myanmar after cyclone

³⁷ AP (07 May 08) First international aid reaches Myanmar after cyclone; Mizzima News (06 May 08) Security agencies put on high alert for referendum

³⁸ Mizzima News (04 May 08) Water shortage in Rangoon, People rush to buy basic needs

³⁹ Mizzima News (06 May 08) Security agencies put on high alert for referendum; Asian Tribune (06 May 08) Burma's Military Too Slow to React to International Aid after Cyclone Nargis

⁴⁰ AP (04 May 08) Cyclone kills more than 350 in Myanmar; AP (06 May 08) Transport, visa hurdles slowing aid to Myanmar storm victims; Irrawaddy (05 May 08) Cyclone could unleash political upheaval; DVB (04 May 08) Local residents complain of lack of help after cyclone; Al Jazeera (05 May 08) Myanmar cyclone kills 10,000 people; AP (07 May 08) First international aid reaches Myanmar after cyclone; Independent (07 May 08) Aid agencies face battle to reach victims of the cyclone

⁴¹ Irrawaddy (05 May 08) Nearly 4,000 People Dead; 3,000 People Missing

⁴² Irrawaddy (05 May 08) Cyclone could unleash political upheaval; Irrawaddy (05 May 08) Aid Agencies Struggle to Assess Burma Cyclone Damage; Irrawaddy (05 May 08) Nearly 4,000 People Dead; 3,000 People Missing; DVB (05 May 08) Rangoon residents suffer in cyclone aftermath; Irrawaddy (07 May 08) Monks aid survivors, authorities sell rooftops; Irrawaddy (07 May 08) Rangoon Struggling to Restore Utilities

⁴³ AP (07 May 08) First international aid reaches Myanmar after cyclone

⁴⁴ Independent (07 May 08) Aid agencies face battle to reach victims of the cyclone

⁴⁵ AP (07 May 08) First international aid reaches Myanmar after cyclone

⁴⁶ TBBC (Oct 07) Internal Displacement in Eastern Burma – 2007 Survey

⁴⁷ Kaladan News (07 May 08) Cyclone lashes Northern Arakan

The sham must go on

Despite widespread damage and a rising death toll, the SPDC made it clear that it plans to go ahead with the 10 May constitutional referendum.⁴⁸ “It’s only a few days left before the coming referendum and people are eager to cast their vote,” the state-run newspaper Myanmar Ahlin said on 5 May.⁴⁹ The SPDC postponed to 24 May the vote in 47 Townships (40 in Rangoon and 7 in Irrawaddy Division) worst hit by the cyclone.⁵⁰

- Civil servants in Naypyidaw were barred from leave until after the referendum. However, many defied the order and left to check on their relatives after the cyclone hit.⁵¹
- An SPDC secret circular reportedly instructed all security agencies to be on high alert, monitor international organizations, and prevent their free movement in the lead up to the referendum.⁵²
- SPDC Army deployed troops in rural areas of Arakan State in preparation for the referendum.⁵³

On 8 May, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon called on the SPDC to postpone the referendum and “focus instead on mobilizing all available resources and capacity for the emergency response efforts.”⁵⁴

While people die, SPDC blocks aid workers

In the immediate aftermath of the cyclone, the SPDC refused to lift restrictions on movements of aid workers.

- On 5 May, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that teams of foreign aid workers were trying to assess the damage and aid needs but the military was restricting their access and movements in the country.⁵⁵
- Of the 40 NGOs working in Burma, only four had permission to work in affected areas.⁵⁶
- WFP country director Chris Kaye said the cooperation provided by the SPDC was insufficient. “In order to meet the needs of the persons most badly affected by the disaster, much more cooperation will be required in the short term,” Kaye said.⁵⁷

As the death toll climbed, the regime expressed a willingness to accept outside help. On 6 May, the SPDC indicated it would welcome aid supplies for victims of the cyclone.⁵⁸ Governments, UN agencies, and independent humanitarian groups rushed to offer assistance for victims of the cyclone. As of 7 May, 24 countries had pledged financial support, with a total of \$30 million expected in aid.⁵⁹

The SPDC responded to the outpouring of international assistance by delaying the issuing of visas to aid workers. The UN appealed to the SPDC to waive visa requirements for aid workers trying to get into the country days after the devastating cyclone.⁶⁰ The junta insisted foreign relief workers would have to negotiate before being allowed to enter the country.⁶¹ “For expert teams from overseas to come here, they have to negotiate with the foreign ministry and our senior authorities,” the SPDC Minister for Relief and Resettlement Maung Maung Swe said.⁶²

⁴⁸ CNN (05 May 08) Myanmar death toll ‘could reach 10,000’

⁴⁹ Irrawaddy (05 May 08) Nearly 4,000 People Dead; 3,000 People Missing

⁵⁰ AFP (06 May 08) Myanmar says referendum will proceed in most of country

⁵¹ Irrawaddy (06 May 08) Burmese officials go AWOL to search for relatives

⁵² Mizzima News (06 May 08) Security agencies put on high alert for referendum

⁵³ Narinjara News (02 May 08) Army to be deployed in rural areas for referendum

⁵⁴ AP (09 May 08) UN officials criticize Myanmar’s response to cyclone

⁵⁵ Al Jazeera (05 May 08) Myanmar cyclone kills 10,000 people

⁵⁶ Independent (07 May 08) Aid agencies face battle to reach victims of the cyclone

⁵⁷ Reuters (06 May 08) Hundreds of thousands need help in Myanmar: U.N.

⁵⁸ AP (06 May 08) UN: Myanmar gives green light for aid; workers await visas

⁵⁹ CNN (07 May 08) U.S. envoy: Myanmar deaths may top 100,000

⁶⁰ Reuters (06 May 08) Hundreds of thousands need help in Myanmar: U.N.; AP (06 May 08) Transport, visa hurdles slowing aid to Myanmar storm victims; Bangkok Post (07 May 08) UN says Burma continues to bar aid workers

⁶¹ AFP (06 May 08) Myanmar says cyclone death toll tops 22,000; AFP (07 May 08) Fears for millions as Myanmar blocks aid workers

⁶² AFP (06 May 08) Myanmar says cyclone death toll tops 15,000

On 8 May, six days after the cyclone hit Burma, aid groups said they were still waiting for visas to enter the country.⁶³ A five-member UN disaster management assessment team in Thailand had not yet received visas allowing them to enter Burma.⁶⁴ Other UN and international aid agencies are also awaiting visas to allow them into the former Burma.⁶⁵

The SPDC added additional red tape by appointing Deputy Foreign Minister Maung Myint to oversee visa applications.⁶⁶ The SPDC also announced the formation of national central committee for prevention [*sic*] of natural disaster chaired by PM Gen Thein Sein to carry out relief operations.⁶⁷

On 8 May, John Holmes, the UN top humanitarian official, voiced his frustration at the junta's foot-dragging. "I'm disappointed by the progress we've seen," Holmes said.⁶⁸

Aid trickles in

On 6 May, international aid began to trickle into Burma, while UN staffers who were already in the country began distributing supplies they had stored within Burma.⁶⁹ However, the UN said more help was needed.⁷⁰

- A Thai military transport plane unloaded 30 tons of medical supplies and 12 tons of food and basic necessities at Rangoon International Airport.⁷¹
- WFP said it had begun the distribution of 800 tons of food in cyclone-damaged areas in Rangoon.⁷²
- On 8 May, two UN planes carrying 27.5 tons of equipment for cyclone survivors and 7.7 tons of high-energy biscuits landed in Rangoon.⁷³

Aid pledged (US\$)	
Australia	3,900,000
British Red Cross	60,000
Canada	2,000,000
China	5,300,000
Christian Aid	100,000
Czech Republic	154,000
Denmark	103,000
European Comm's Humtn Office (ECHO)	3,000,000
France	309,200
Germany	1,500,000
Greece	300,000
Indonesia	1,000,000
Intl Fedn of Red Cross & Red Crescent Socs	190,000
Israel	100,000
Japan	10,000,000
Kuwait	5,000,000
New Zealand	500,000
Norway	1,960,000
Singapore	200,000
South Korea	2,100,000
Spain	775,000
Sri Lanka	25,000
Swiss Red Cross	190,000
Switzerland	475,000
Thailand	100,000
United Kingdom	10,000,000
United Nations	10,000,000
United States	3,250,000
World Health Organization (WHO)	175,000

BACKGROUND

Humanitarian aid restrictions in Burma

The SPDC has a long history of hindering international aid organizations through restrictive policies, bureaucratic obstacles, taxes, and visa restrictions. The SPDC has prevented international staff of humanitarian agencies from moving and operating freely within the country⁷⁴ and restricted FAO, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO staff in providing assistance to populations living in conflict areas.⁷⁵

⁶³ AFP (07 May 08) Fears for millions as Myanmar blocks aid workers; Reuters (07 May 08) Myanmar cyclone toll nearing 22,500

⁶⁴ Reuters (07 May 08) Myanmar cyclone toll nearing 22,500; Irrawaddy (06 May 08) UN Aid Has Yet to Reach Burma; VOA (07 May 08) World Offers Aid to Burma as Cyclone Death Toll Tops 22,000

⁶⁵ Reuters (07 May 08) Myanmar cyclone toll nearing 22,500; Irrawaddy (06 May 08) UN Aid Has Yet to Reach Burma; VOA (07 May 08) World Offers Aid to Burma as Cyclone Death Toll Tops 22,000; AP (06 May 08) WHO says Burma faces major health worries

⁶⁶ AFP (07 May 08) Fears for millions as Myanmar blocks aid workers

⁶⁷ Xinhua (03 May 08) Feature: Deadly cyclone changes face of Myanmar's biggest city

⁶⁸ AP (09 May 08) UN officials criticize Myanmar's response to cyclone

⁶⁹ AP (07 May 08) First international aid reaches Myanmar after cyclone; VOA (07 May 08) World Offers Aid to Burma as Cyclone Death Toll Tops 22,000

⁷⁰ DVB (06 May 08) UN says several hundred thousand need water and shelter

⁷¹ AP (06 May 08) Myanmar delta, where 22,000 died, isolated after cyclone; Bangkok Post (07 May 08) Cyclone Nargis death toll soars past 22,000; Washington Post (07 May 08) 60,000 Dead or Missing in Burma

⁷² Reuters (06 May 08) Hundreds of thousands need help in Myanmar: U.N.; Irrawaddy (06 May 08) UN Aid Has Yet to Reach Burma; VOA (07 May 08) World Offers Aid to Burma as Cyclone Death Toll Tops 22,000

⁷³ AP (08 May 08) WFP: 1st UN aid planes land in Myanmar but other arrivals remain uncertain

⁷⁴ US Government Accountability Office (Apr 07) Assistance Programs Constrained in Burma

⁷⁵ US Government Accountability Office (Apr 07) Assistance Programs Constrained in Burma

- In August 2005, the WFP said it could deliver only 430 of 5,500 tons of rice available for Western Burma due to permit requirements, checkpoints, local taxes, and other restrictions of movement. The WFP declared the situation “absolutely unacceptable” and also asked the SPDC to lift its 10% tax on WFP rice purchases.⁷⁶
- ICRC staff estimated that between 2002 and October 2006, regime interference reduced the scope of ICRC’s assistance and protection activities by 90%.⁷⁷ In March 2007, the ICRC announced it had been forced to close two of its five remaining field offices.⁷⁸
- The SPDC has consistently refused visas to UN envoys for fact-finding mission.

In February 2006, the SPDC imposed more restrictive guidelines for aid organizations:

- Aid workers cannot access project sites because of tight travel restrictions that require approval by the SPDC to travel outside Rangoon.
- The series of approvals required to implement humanitarian aid projects causes more delays.
- Aid is stymied by setting roadblocks and checkpoints requiring travel permits, and by taxing supplies at both the national and local levels. Funds that could be used to help people are instead spent to overcome these regime-created barriers.
- By requiring aid organizations to deposit funds into a regime-operated bank, the SPDC is undermining attempts to achieve transparency and accountability.

In February 2006, the SPDC established tighter restrictions on humanitarian aid delivery, policies reinforced in January 2008.⁷⁹ These guidelines further complicated approval processes, restricted travel to and within the country, established new regulating bodies as well as empowered existing ones, and altogether hindered the work of aid organizations in Burma, both foreign and domestic. UN agencies and international NGOs reported the restrictions further hampered their efforts.⁸⁰

- Since February 2006, UN officials have reported difficulties in obtaining permission for outside experts to visit sites in Burma.⁸¹
- In September 2007, the WFP warned that new SPDC restrictions on the movement of food were interfering with the delivery of food to half a million starving people.⁸²
- Since the Saffron Revolution, Burmese staff members with UN organizations and international NGOs who have applied for a passport renewal at the passport office, have been reporting longer than usual delays, and outright refusal for some.⁸³
- Since January 2008, the validity of travel permits for international aid workers to work in the field has been reduced from three months to one.⁸⁴
- Key positions remain unfilled because the SPDC has refused to grant visas to nominated persons.

Coping with natural disasters: a history of failures

Cyclone in Arakan State – May 2004

The SPDC waited ten days to report publicly the 19 May 2004 cyclone in Arakan State – the worst in Western Burma in over 40 years. According to the Red Cross, the storm killed at least 220 people and left 14,000 others homeless. It took two weeks for the regime to plea for international assistance to cope with the humanitarian disaster.⁸⁵

Floods in Kachin State – July 2004

In July 2004, the junta arrested a man who recorded footage of floods affecting Myitkyina, Kachin State. State-run newspaper Kyemon reported that the flood caused no casualties or property damage. However, a local NGO asserted that over 50 people were killed and 5,000 homes damaged in greater Myitkyina.⁸⁶

⁷⁶ Reuters (05 Aug 05) Myanmar to lift food aid tax, barriers remain - WFP

⁷⁷ US Government Accountability Office (Apr 07) Assistance Programs Constrained in Burma

⁷⁸ Mizzima News (03 Mar 07) ICRC to close down two field offices in Burma

⁷⁹ BBC Burmese Service (21 Jan 08) Burma tightened the rules for INGOs; Mizzima News (29 Jan 08) Burmas government tightens its grip on international aid agencies

⁸⁰ Irrawaddy (29 Jun 07) UN coordinator’s report lists causes of Burma’s social problems

⁸¹ US Government Accountability Office (Apr 07) Assistance Programs Constrained in Burma

⁸² UN News Centre (28 Sep 07) Unrest in Myanmar could block food aid for 500,000 people, UN food agency warns

⁸³ Irrawaddy (12 Feb 08) Junta tightens passports for NGO staff

⁸⁴ UN Human Rights Council, Seventh Session (07 Mar 08) Report of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar [A/HRC/7/18]

⁸⁵ AFP (09 Jun 04) Myanmar PM tours region devastated by cyclone

⁸⁶ Irrawaddy (30 Jul 04) Flood Documentary Maker Arrested

Indian Ocean Tsunami – December 2004

On 26 December 2004, the tsunami struck Burma's coastline. On the following day, the New Light of Myanmar gave no report on the disaster. It took two full days for the regime to officially report minimal totals of casualties and those displaced.⁸⁷ The figures were updated on 1 January.⁸⁸ However, reports by NGOs and independent news agencies contradicted official numbers with much higher totals.⁸⁹ The junta later arrived at a death toll of 61 people.⁹⁰ On 30 December, the junta's ministries of health and social welfare officially refused offers of international relief assistance during a meeting attended by representatives of 15 aid organizations, including UN agencies and ICRC. They claimed was no need for an emergency operation and the SPDC could handle the situation.⁹¹ On 6 January 2005, SPDC PM Soe Win claimed that Burma could cope by itself and international assistance would be of better use elsewhere.⁹²

Earthquake in Shan State – December 2004

On 26 December, a 6.4 earthquake linked to the tsunami hit Burma. Reports from Shan State indicated that the quake killed 13 people in Namzang Township. SPDC authorities ordered the local population to keep quiet about the natural disaster.⁹³

Cyclone Mala – April 2006

From 28 to 30 April, tropical cyclone Mala swept through the Irrawaddy delta, the Western coast of Burma, and the outskirts of Rangoon.⁹⁴ On 4 May, the New Light of Myanmar reported 21 people were killed and another 14 missing.⁹⁵ The ICRC reported 7,000-8,000 houses had been damaged.⁹⁶

- In the days following, it was reported that no relief had been organized for cyclone victims in Arakan State, with no emergency assistance for cyclone-affected victims in Gwa and Thandwe.⁹⁷
- The SPDC reportedly ordered soldiers and public servants to contribute to funds for cyclone victims.⁹⁸
- A Rangoon-based newspaper editor complained of a lack of access to coastal regions and official SPDC guidelines that demanded "positive and constructive" coverage.⁹⁹

Floods in Mandalay – October 2006

Floods devastated Mandalay Division. Kyaukse, the town hardest hit, experienced their worst floods in 60 years, with 5,000 people forced from their homes.¹⁰⁰

- Many homeless victims took refuge in Buddhist monasteries, as local authorities failed to provide assistance.¹⁰¹
- Hundreds of flood victims in Kyaukse complained of inadequate aid.¹⁰² State-run newspapers did not give any detailed figure of casualties and damages there.¹⁰³
- State-run press reported an official death toll of 19; local sources disputed the figure as too low.¹⁰⁴

⁸⁷ New Light of Myanmar (29 Dec 04) Press conference on bomb blast, unlicensed vehicles and damages caused by strong earthquake; AP (28 Dec 04) Burma's Tidal Wave Death Toll 90 and Rising

⁸⁸ New Light of Myanmar (01 Jan 04) Loss of lives, property in recent earthquakes

⁸⁹ Irrawaddy (30 Dec 04) Paucity of Information on Tsunami in Burma; Narinjara (09 Jan 05) Arakan State's tsunami death toll rises to 96

⁹⁰ AFP (09 April 05) Asian tsunami toll revised down to 217,000

⁹¹ Irrawaddy (31 Dec 04) Burma Regime Rejects Offers of Disaster Aid

⁹² AP (06 Jan 05) Myanmar prime minister says his country can cope with tsunami

⁹³ SHAN (16 Jan 05) More aftershock deaths reported

⁹⁴ Irrawaddy (01 May 06) Cyclone Mala Killed Four and Injured Several in Burma

⁹⁵ AFP (04 May 06) Cyclone Mala death toll in Myanmar rises to 21

⁹⁶ Mizzima News (04 May 06) Death toll reaches 22 after cyclone Mala

⁹⁷ Narinjara News (03 May 06) Arakan State Governor Visits Cyclone Affected Areas

⁹⁸ Narinjara News (04 May 06) Authorities ask for Kyat 50,000 from Battalions for cyclone relief

⁹⁹ Irrawaddy (09 May 06) Cyclone Mala Killed Dozens on West Coast

¹⁰⁰ Irrawaddy (16 Oct 06) Burma Flood Toll Rises; DVB (23 Oct 06) Life after floods at Burma's Kyaukse; DVB (28 Oct 06) Burmese flood victims still homeless

¹⁰¹ DVB (28 Oct 06) Burmese flood victims still homeless

¹⁰² Irrawaddy (16 Oct 06) Burma Flood Toll Rises

¹⁰³ DVB (23 Oct 06) Life after floods at Burma's Kyaukse

¹⁰⁴ Irrawaddy (16 Oct 06) Burma Flood Toll Rises