



May 13, 2008

PRESS STATEMENT FROM THE BURMESE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS (BAAT):

**Kickoff of State Wide Relief Efforts to Support the Myanmar (Burmese)
People Impacted by Cyclone Nargis**

Since May 2nd, like other Texans, we witnessed the tragedy of Cyclone Nargis unfold in our living rooms and in our email inboxes. *Unlike* other Texans, however, the destroyed paddy fields, saffron robed monks and the faces of the survivors brought us back to something familiar. Our home.

Texas has been kind to us and for that we are forever grateful. It has allowed us to pursue careers, education and create more opportunity for our children. Many people from our country have not been as fortunate, and we have seen some of them suffer immensely over the last week. The Burmese people in the region victimized by the cyclone are the backbone of the country and without them, life would not exist.

Burmese culture teaches us a sense of grace, patience and hope and always in the face of extraordinary perseverance. As the days came and went since May 2nd, however, we have seen this fire of hope diminish from the faces of the Burmese people. Instead, a fire burns into our souls. We know it is our responsibility to contribute something to bring back this hope. This is the reason we are here today.

Never have the Burmese people had to face such a horrific, natural tragedy. According to the United Nations, about 1.5 million people are on the verge of facing a public health disaster. Burmese doctors struggling to keep up with the demand of need are saying that famine and disease are just around the corner. It is feared that there is a large number of orphaned children due to the cyclone. The tsunami-like storm surge, combined with extreme winds destroyed an estimated 95% of housing in the Irrawaddy delta. Almost all fertile agriculturally land was inundated with salt water and will require significant time to bring back to normal. Thousands of families lost all of their farming assets and foods stored for the rest of the year. Fishing, as well as poultry and livestock industries were severely damaged or totally lost.

While we will probably never know the exact number of dead, we know it is extraordinary. The U.S. State Department projects it will soon extend well beyond 100,000 and the United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs states that this is due to "acute environmental issues that could pose an immediate risk to human life and health." This figure also does not include the long term impact on the country's food supplies.

Today, we are thankful to the Savoy Restaurant for opening its banquet hall to allow us to announce a very important endeavor. The Burmese American Association of Texas, together with Asian American Family Services, is partnering to ask for help from our fellow Texans. The BAAT is seeking to raise \$250,000 to help the Burmese people suffering from the cyclone. Every dollar contributed will be matched up to \$100,000. Donations can be made at www.baatx.org or mailed to: BAAT, P. O. Box 3359, Sugar Land, Texas 77487 (Memo: Myanmar Cyclone Relief Fund). We would like to appeal to the public to support our efforts and also to assist us in reaching other Texans. Through our contacts, BAAT will ensure that funds donated will be distributed outside official channels to non-governmental organizations that will directly impact the people.

No other people in this world love the U.S. more than the Burmese people. For this we are certain. Texas is also special. Many comparisons are made about the size of Texas and Burma. They are roughly the same. What if the area between Port Lavaca and Huntsville and all the way to the Louisiana border were obliterated in a matter of hours? Imagine this for a second and please help the Burmese people.

We would like to open the floor for questions.

CONTACT: Mr. Myo Aye Thane 281-221-6255
Ms. Aye Khaine 832-563-4827

*The **Burmese American Association of Texas** is a non-partisan, cultural and social organization. We have served the Myanmar (Burmese) community throughout Texas for over 25 years and work to educate the wider Texas community about the beauty of all things Burmese. For more information about BAAT and its Cyclone Relief efforts, please go to www.baatx.org.*

Written by Charlotte O'Sullivan; All Statistics from the United Nations or U.S. Department of State