

June 10, 2008

**Dear Colleagues,**

It is now just over a month since cyclone Nargis struck the Irrawaddy delta, Yangon, and other areas of Myanmar on May 3, 2008. Latest reports indicate 77,738 people killed, 55,917 people missing, and 2.4 million people affected. This is one of the largest emergencies to which CARE has responded since the Asian tsunami. Jon Mitchell, the Director of the CARE International Emergency Group, just returned from a visit there and provided an update on what is happening on the ground.

Knowing that many staff are being asked about CARE's response in Myanmar, we wanted to give you some key points on what we are doing:

**A snapshot so far** – CARE has assisted 118,000 people with food, non-food items such as household and hygiene supplies, shelter and clean water. CARE was able to mount an immediate response to the cyclone and it has been authorized to work in areas where it previously had no presence. CARE has worked in Myanmar for 14 years and has a staff of over 500 people, all of whom safely weathered the disaster. CARE Australia is the lead CI member for Myanmar.

**Field visit** – Although CARE had not previously worked in the hard-hit Irrawaddy delta, we are now authorized to work in some areas there. On a trip to the isolated delta village of Kanthar, staff could see clumps of grass hanging on trees up to two meters above the ground level – evidence of how high the storm surge had risen during the cyclone. In Kanthar, 800 of a total population of 4,500 people are either dead or missing—one out of roughly every 5 or 6 people. People had lost everything—houses, food stocks, and rice seeds—yet remarkably there was the sense of people's resilience. They are getting on with their lives by rebuilding from what they can find out of the debris. Newly rebuilt bamboo and palm frond houses are popping up everywhere. Yet, without rice seeds, people will be unable to plant for the next harvest, and having lost most of their food, those in the worst affected areas, like Kanthar, will need food aid until then. Communities also need shelter materials, household items, and assistance with clean water supply.

CARE was the only agency helping the people in Kanthar. We had provided two weeks of food rations, some household items, and now diesel fuel for the pumps that the community was using to clean out their water pond.

**Access and authorizations** – For CARE and other aid agencies, access to the people most affected by the cyclone was slowed by the Myanmar government's authorization processes. But CARE has been able to win authorizations from the government to work in two townships of the western delta, where relief activities are winding down, and in six townships of the eastern delta, where CARE now plans to focus a concerted relief and recovery program over the next two years. We expect to reach up to 200,000 people in these areas.

**Staffing** – Our response in Myanmar was also initially hampered by the Myanmar government's delays in visa approvals for foreign nationals with specialized emergency response skills. However, by the end of the second week, three international staff with pre-existing Myanmar visas entered the country. During the third week, a team leader entered the country with a new visa, followed by three other staff last week. In addition, 36 national staff from existing CARE development programs have been reassigned to the emergency response, plus six CARE Myanmar head office staff. One international HR specialist is helping the country office urgently recruit another 100 local staff.

Country office staff who are working on the emergency response have worked extremely hard in very difficult circumstances. In most cases, this has been 7 days per week, with 12-14 hour days, for the entire month. It is important for us to recognize and appreciate the dedication and commitment of our Myanmar staff—but also important to give them some respite to avoid burn out.

**Funding** – CARE USA has raised over \$6 million toward the CI \$10 million fund raising target, which, with the fundraising of other CI members, we have now exceeded. Any future funding will now be limited to supporting specific case-by-case opportunities and needs for longer-term recovery programs as agreed between the country office and CI members.

**Support from Bangkok** – We have received many donations in Bangkok, where we have set up a support hub for procurement, logistics, media and communications, as well as coordination with the UN. Once some clearance issues were resolved, we began air shipments to Yangon. So far, around 16 flights have brought in supplies and equipment. A CARE warehouse in Yangon was established last week and, with the arrival of an international logistician, proper systems are now being put in-place for distribution.

**CARE solidarity** - The solidarity, support and understanding of many CARE staff and offices around the world towards our emergency response in Myanmar has been tremendous and much appreciated.

Regards,

Helene and Steve

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