

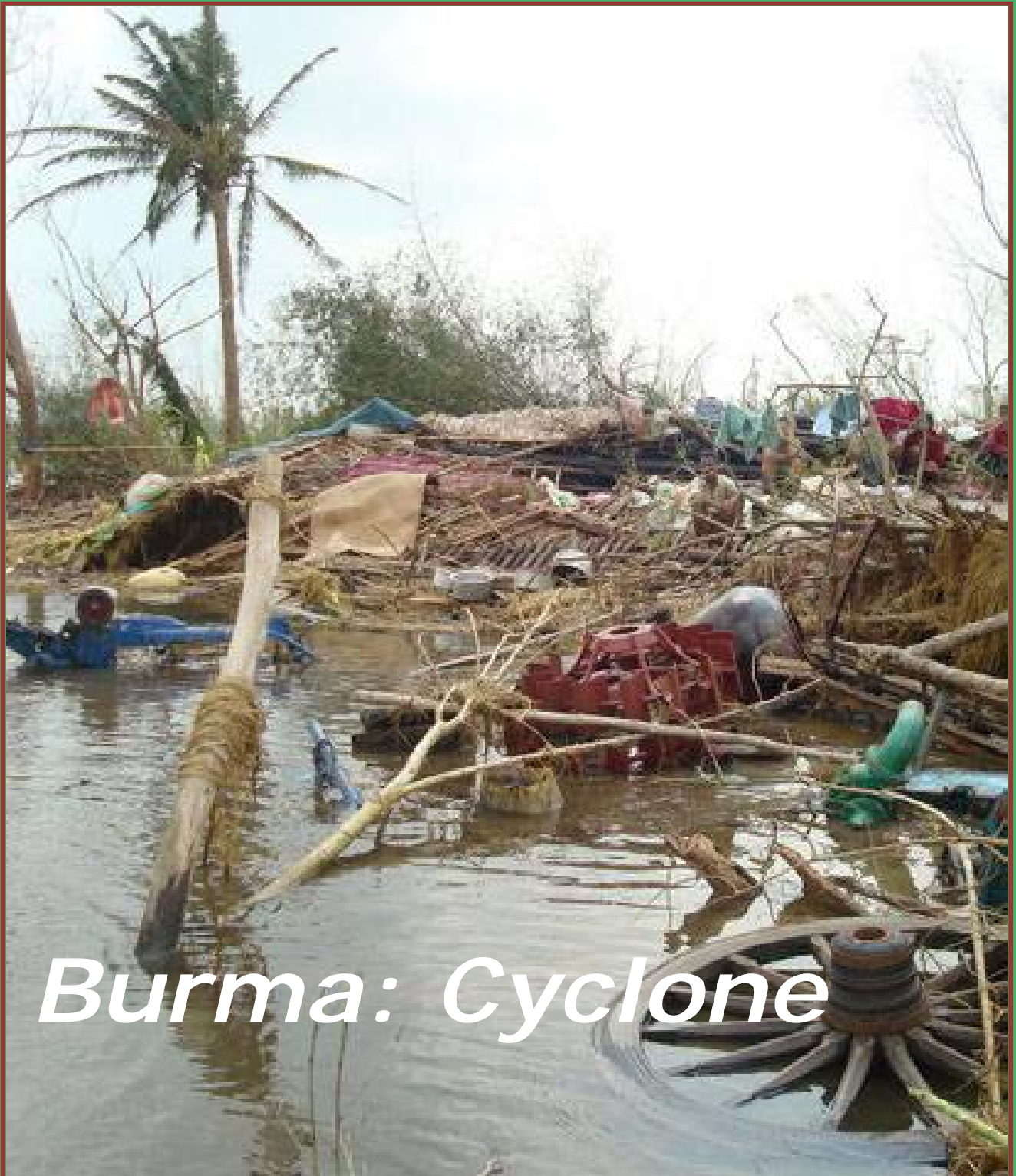
Inside News

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Burma: Cyclone

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE COMMITTEE FOR INTERNALLY DISPLACED KAREN PEOPLE (CIDKP)



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They did nothing!

The trail of destruction Cyclone Nargis left in its wake, also exposed Burma's military dictators as inept, cruel and malicious with a total disregard for the welfare of the Burmese people.

It is estimated as many as 2.4 million Burmese were severely affected by the cyclone, yet the military strongmen stood by and watched the people suffer.

To the regime's eternal shame, they not only did nothing to help, but went to extreme lengths to block international aid workers and supplies getting to the people in need.

While the generals toyed with the UN, Burmese people died.

Bodies decomposed where they lay.

It was obvious the military regime had no plans, strategies or the will to deal with the natural disaster.

It's now two months since the cyclone hit Burma and the situation is not much better.

The dead are visible, left to rot in fields and waterways.

People rely on getting relief from monks and ordinary citizens.

People in Burma know from bitter experience the regime is useless and impervious to the needs of the people.

Ironically, when the regime realized there were huge amounts of money to be donated, they hastily prepared a detailed budget, even down to the number of chickens and the eggs.

Men, women, children helplessly thrashed around while millions of dollars of aid was stacked in neighbouring countries and on US and French ships. Yet, in spite of the overwhelming evidence that Burmese people were dying in their tens of thousand the international community stood back and honored the regime's restrictions. Even to the point of exchanging UN aid dollars at exorbitant rates. Again the UN did as the military dictators ordered.

For all the "positive media spin" they gave to their response to the cyclone, the UN, INGOs and their governments failed the Burmese people in their hour of need.

The generals did nothing, but rob the Burmese people, they are still in charge going about their business as usual – torturing, using forced labor, landmining and displacing villagers.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

If you want to find out how you can help internally displaced Karen people: email kidpc@cscsoms.com hlahenry@hotmail.com or write to CIDKP, PO Box 22, Mae Sot, Tak 63110, Thailand.

Burma's rice bowl destroyed

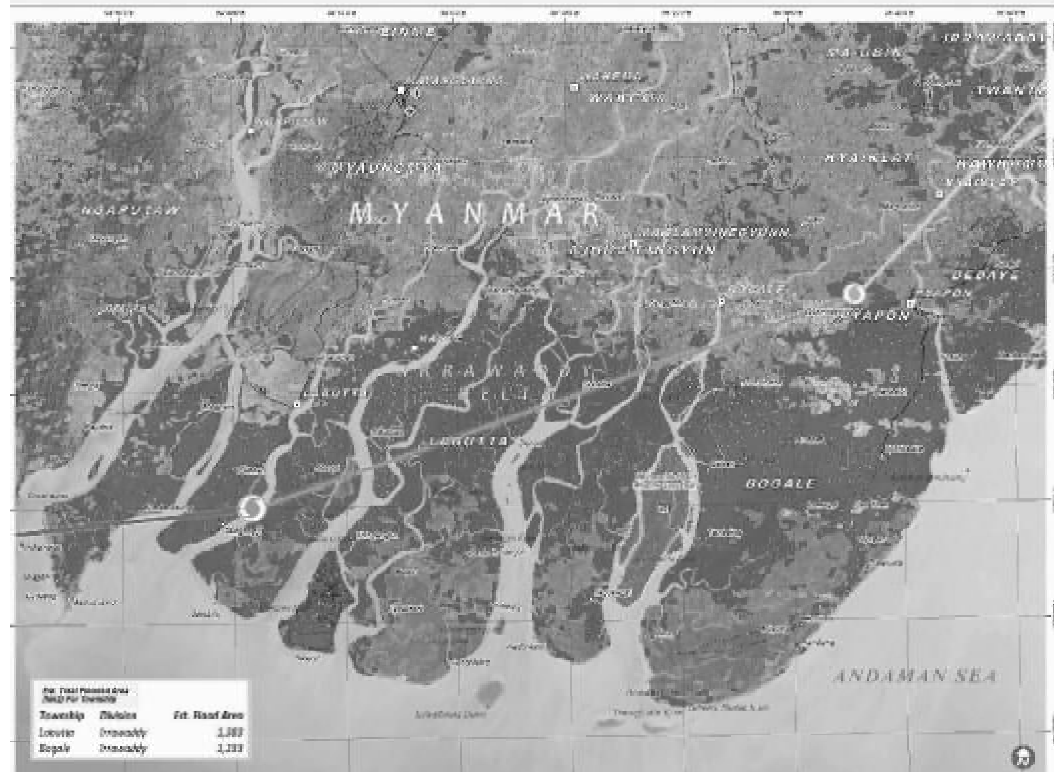
FLOOD ASSESSMENT FOR CYCLONE AFFECTED LAPUTTO & BAGALE TOWNSHIPS, MYANMAR

Flood Analysis with MODIS Terra & Aqua Data Recorded 3 May & 12 April 2008

This map illustrates satellite-derived flood waters over the affected Myanmar area of Laputto & Bagale Townships. The map shows the extent of the flood waters as they moved inland from the coast. The map was generated by the Myanmar Press Photo Agency (MPPA) and is available for free use. The map is based on data recorded on 3 May & 12 April 2008.



Cyclone Nargis
8 May 2008
Version 1.1
FC-3688-00007-MND



The Irrawaddy Delta, recently devastated by Cyclone Nargis is also known as the rice bowl of Burma. Most of Burma's rice is grown there. Cyclone Nargis destroyed thousands acres of farmlands. Most rice fields are covered in salt water making rice growing impossible. Farm equipment and animals were also destroyed. People in the delta region depend on growing rice and farming for their livelihoods, many like farmer, Saw Tha Ku, are facing a crisis.

He says his fields were damaged by storm water and his cows and buffaloes were all killed by the cyclone.

"I can't grow rice this year, salt water from the sea covered and damaged my field and 20 of my cows and buffaloes were killed. The cyclone also damaged my storage barn that contained 1000 baskets of paddy so now we don't have rice to eat."

Saw Tha Ku, 32, from Plaw Lah Hay village, near Laputta Township has two sisters and two brothers. They all earn their living by farming. He has 30 acres of farmland.

There are 100 households in Plaw Lah Hay village, every house, according to Saw Tha Ku, was damaged by Cyclone Nargis. The village farmers

had about 600 acres damaged by floodwaters.

"The houses were damaged, including my house. Our farmland is no good - nobody can work it. In Plaw Lah Hay, 70 percent of our people are farmers. We used to harvest 80 baskets of paddy a acre. Now it will not easy to get as much paddy as before. We will face many problems."

Saw Tha Ku thought that he would die during the cyclone, but he says prays and good fortune helped him survive.

"I first heard the sound of raining, wind blowing and thunder. I didn't know anything, I can't see anything and I was thrown and blown by the wind on the field, I took shelter under a tree. I thought I would die. I remember God and prayed to him hard."

Saw Tha Ku younger sister was not so lucky she lost her child.

"I feel sorry for my sister Naw Kwe K'baw. She has two children and is also pregnant. Her older daughter was only three years old and was lost at the time of the storm. We don't know if she is alive or dead, she is still missing feared dead."

Religious educator, Saw Kaw Ku, 40, lives in Setsu village tract, Bokalay Township and said in his district

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Naw Eh Weh's had enough

The Burmese military regime received a warning four days from India that Cyclone Nargis was about to hit Burma. The generals didn't pass on the warning to the Burmese people. Cyclone Nargis can't be blamed on Burma's inept leaders, but their inaction was criminal.

Naw Eh Weh, 50, from the Irrawaddy Delta, says she first heard about the storm from the radio that there was a possible cyclone on its way, but there was no need to be concerned.

Naw Eh Weh's village is far from the sea, she describes what happen.

"On May 2nd around 6 o'clock, there was some rain. At 11 o'clock, there was more rain with strong winds and flooding. We were lucky because our village is far from sea."

Naw Eh Weh says there are 200 households in her village and two thirds of the houses were destroyed by falling trees.

"Many wooden houses were damaged. Three people died and many houses and food supplies were destroyed."

Naw Eh Weh found it hard to find food after the storm.

"Our rice storage barn's roofs were ripped off by strong winds. We tried to dig up the paddy. We didn't get any help, but we helped each other."

Naw Eh Weh said they have been ignored by the government.

"The authorities see our problem as not big and they ignored us. Our houses roofs were torn off and we need to buy new roofs, but we don't have money for that. The government has increased the cost of roofing materials."

Naw Eh Weh said shops have close because of the worry that their goods will be stolen.

Naw Eh Weh's house was totally destroyed.

"My house was built near the river it was damaged by the floods. My fields were ruined by salt water. I couldn't stay. I left with my two sons, to stay with relatives in Rangoon."

She said despite the tragedy caused by the cyclone, the government still pushes for people to vote in the referendum.

"Before the cyclone, the authorities came to our village and ordered us on May 10 to vote 'yes' for their constitution. After Cyclone Nargis, they don't think how to help us, but they kept warning us to go and vote."

Naw Eh Weh said she this harassment to vote was the final straw.

"I don't want to continue to live in Burma any more, so I left my village and fled to the Thai border with my two sons."



Lack of care leads to health crisis

It is almost two months since the Cyclone Nargis destroyed parts of Burma, yet the military regime's refusal to allow aid workers in and their ineptness has meant humanitarian relief has not reached all of the affected areas.

International aid agencies and disaster experts warned there would be a secondary wave of deaths or an outbreak of disease if the junta continues their restrictions.

Conservative official figures say Cyclone Nargis caused 84,537 deaths and 53,836 missing, the UN estimates more than 2.4 millions people were affected. The World Health Organization (WHO) reported that "...1.3 millions people have been reached by national or international relief but the number receiving sustained assistance is unclear. The most frequently reported causes of illness are malaria, dengue, diarrhea and acute respiratory infections."

Aye Lwin, a member of Emergency Assistance Team – Burma (EAT-Burma) says access to clean water is a major challenge.

"Getting clean water is a major problem for people. Wells and other water sources were all destroyed by salt seawater. Many thought that the people would get drinking water from the rain, but the rain water is also contaminated and it is not fit for people to drink."

Among those 2.4 million people affected 1.3 million have been reached, but, as many as half, 1.1 million people haven't received any help.

EAT-Burma have film evidence that the death and destruction caused by the cyclone hasn't been

cleaned up properly; debris from smashed houses, fallen trees, stagnant water, dead bodies of both people and animals have still not be disposed off.

The Burmese's military government claims that a survey undertaken jointly with the UN and the regional Association of Southeast Asia Nation (ASEAN) has not found any post-cyclone deaths related to a lack of assistance.

However, aid agency, Oxfam, reports that the situation is still grim... "the ground in and around villages is covered in water, with a substantial increase in mosquitoes and thus an increased risk of malaria and dengue. The high level of surface water has also led to overflowing latrines which present a significant health risk. In addition, many latrines have been destroyed leaving people without access to clean and dignified toilet facilities."

Aye Lwin says it is difficult to get clean water to flood affected villages in the Irrawaddy Delta. He says the waterways are polluted with dead bodies and human waste.

"Villagers do not have proper toilets and rotten bodies are still lying in fields. People are faced with malaria, diarrhea, skin infections and other diseases." U.N Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said.

"Unless more aid gets into the country — quickly — we face the risk of an outbreak of infectious diseases that could worsen today's crisis."

Despite the international community's strong effort to save lives, the Burmese military government's restrictions on foreign aid and their rejection of highly skilled aid workers show a lack of care or concern for the Burmese people.



A survivor's -



Cyclone Nargis added to the increased number of internally displaced people in Burma. The United Nation's Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) says that as many as 77,738 people died and another 55,917 are missing 1.3 million people of 2.4 total affected people has received humanitarian assistance.

One man who felt the full brunt of the cyclone as it wrecked havoc, is Saw O'ra Mahn, 24, from Po K' ma village, Laputta township.

"About three o'clock in the evening, heavy rain fell and about an hour later the strong winds started to smash our village."

O'ra Mahn says the flood waters followed soon after. "No one had time to escape, those who survived are lucky."

O'ra Mahn explains how he survived.

"The storm and flood raged for about four hours, then it went quiet for five minutes before it got stronger. I was visiting Thay Ka Ko village at the time but wanted to get back to my village. It wasn't far, but the storm forced me to look for shelter. I saw a coconut tree and climbed up it. I had to stay there for eight hours."

O'ra Mahn says the sounds of the cyclone were terrifying.

"It rained and the wind ripped trees from the ground. People cry out in the village. I held the coconut tree tight. It was afraid I would die. I was tired and brusied."

O'ra Mahn talked about what it was like when the storm eased.

"I couldn't find my family and couldn't see anything. All the s were destroyed and there was no sounds just silence. We couldn't help each other we were beat. In the morning I saw the church, it appeared out of the destruction like a ship. I reached it and it was half destroyed. Nearly 70 people were already there. Our village is a Pwo Karen Christian village. Almost 800 of Pwo Karen people from our were killed by the cyclone, only 200 survived."

O'ra Mahn the destruction from the cyclone was horrific. Dead people and animals were everywhere. Buildings were smashed, all food, stock and utilities were gone. O'ra Mahn was more worried about his family.

"My entire family was wiped out. My parents, older sister, younger brother, my wife and daughter were

- story

all dead. Cyclone Nargis killed them. I can't ever get them back. I can't explain how sad I am. I never saw deaths like this, how can I go on. How can I live my life without them?"

O'ra Mahn says surviving the storm was only the beginning.

"There was no food. We tried to food floating in the water or we found rotten rice."

A humanitarian group, Emergency Assistance Team (EAT –Burma) helping people in the cyclone devastated Irrawady Delta says it will be years before the region is safe for people.

Aye Lwin a relief worker with EAT – Burma says the rain is contaminated with chemicals.

"If people don't get clean water, nutritional food, have access to toilets and the dead bodies are removed from waterways there will be outbreaks of disease."

Aye Lwin says EAT-Burma teams are able to get support to some victims, but says the military regime is failing in its duty to the Burmese people.

"The distribution of aid by the government is not been given free and or is there fair distribution. Authorities are harassing victims. It is also difficult to transport because of the destruction of roads and bridges."

Aye Lwin says giving international aid to the military regime will not help people like O'ra Mahn who badly needed treatment.

Instead he had to rely on a under resourced Karen doctor who treated people for free and arranged food and shelter for them in They Pa Ko Kyi village. O'ra Mahn says a Karen Missionary from Ta Lu Pa Taw came to They Pa Ko Kyi village and sent him to Laputta Town.

"I went with them met with friends who survived. We wanted to help. We worked with the missionaries and followed them to Pasein town. We talked about our trauma and situation for the Karen villagers who needed support, foods and medicines."

O'ra Mahn says the government didn't help.

"We only had the church and some individual groups. Missionary took two trucks and two boats of villagers to Luputta Town. There are many of injured and orphaned children. We also get some aid from singers and other small groups who came to help us."

O'ra Mahn says he can't live in his village without his family.

"I don't want to stay there without my parents, wife and daughter. I worked with missionaries until I came to Mae La Refugee Camp in Thailand."





“I lost everything -

When Cyclone Nargis hit Burma's Irrawaddy Delta in early May it caused enormous damage to property, killed thousands of people and left many more missing.

Karen people living in Labbutta township South West part of Irrawaddy Delta suffered great losses in the storm.

Saw Tun Tun, 32, from Po K'ma village, near Labbutta Township lost his family – his three children and his wife.

Saw Tun Tun was not with his family when the cyclone struck. He was working as a fisherman in Arakan (Rakhaing) State. When he heard about the storm, he returned to his village immediately.

“I left Kyaut Pyu in the morning at about nine and it took me a day and a night. I arrive back in Rangoon the next morning at six o'clock. I had to stay in Rangoon for four days before I arrive back home because of the difficulty of getting transport”.

Saw Tun Tun said he was in shock when he reached his village and saw the damage.

“There was no house. Every house in the village was destroyed, only the hospital was left and there was

water everywhere.”

Saw Tun Tun looked everywhere for his wife and my children.

“I searched everywhere to find them, but I couldn't, not even their bodies.”

Po K'Ma village suffered great losses, and as many as 900 of the 1000 villagers were killed in the cyclone.

Saw Tun Tun found his brother-in-law who explained what had happen to his family.

“My brother-in-law told me that when there was first heavy rain, my wife was unconscious because of she had a heart attack. My eldest daughter was only 8 and didn't know how to help her mother. The rose water quickly but my wife couldn't get out of the house as she hadn't regained consciousness.”

Saw Tun Tun says villagers tried to help his wife and children get to safety.

“My wife came around and tried to escape the house. While they were running a strong wind blew and many coconuts and trees fell down but managed to take refuge in Mahn Ka Ni's house.”

Saw Tun Tun said, Mahn Ka Ni is a religious leader and helps look after the poor. According to Saw

Tun Tun almost 200 people took shelter in Mahn Ka Ni's house until his got smashed with in the storm.

"The wind hit the house breaking it in two. Most of the 200 people in the house died. Only three of Mahn Ka Ni's sons survived out of a family of 11. My wife and my children were also killed."

Saw Tun Tun explains that the grief he felt at the death of his family sent him crazy and he wanted to

die. He ate nothing for four days until friends forced him. He says when he sees other children he wants to cry.

Saw Tun Tun likes to talk about his children.

"My children were very cute. It hurt me that I couldn't find their bodies. I was only away from my family to make money for them, but now they are lost forever."

Po K'ma village was battered by the cyclone. Crops were destroyed and villagers had no food so they left for Lay Pa Taw village. Villagers who had rice shared with those who had nothing.

Saw Tun Tun said life is very difficult after the cyclone, there's no clean land to grow food.

"I stayed in another village but I didn't have enough food and I can't work. I miss my wife and children so much. I decided to leave for the border."

Saw Tun Tun and three friends made their way to the Thai border and it took them three days to reach Mae La Refugee Camp.

"We don't know anybody here, but we can stay and food is available for us. We don't have a house yet but the camp committee provided us a with a place to stay."

"My children were very cute. It hurt me that I couldn't find their bodies. I was only away from my family to make money for them, but now they are lost forever."

- I love..."



Speaking out -



Burma's military regime has made another promise to the international community that they cannot keep. They had have signed the regional Association of Southeast Asia Nation's (ASEAN) Charter, promising to observe democratic principles and protect human right. But to the 1,800 political prisoners it's just another sick joke.

In Burma, being a writer, comic, poet, cartoonist is hard. Writing poems, telling jokes or making fun of the government risk a jail for three months and fined. Peacefully protesting against rising consumer prices risk being arrested for "undermining stability and security of the nation". Being involved in opposition politics people can be arrested and questioned at any time.

Thiha Bahla, an activist who was involved in organizing the 2007 September protest and the "NO" campaign for the referendum vote, says there is no freedom of expression and no freedom of assembly under the military government.

"We cannot say or write any thing that criticizes the government. Many writers and journalists were jailed for writing their own views. Two of my friends were arrested last month in Taunggyi for posting an anti-dictatorship slogan on the wall of a school and a monastery."

The main opposition party in Burma, National League for Democracy – Liberated Area (NLD-LA) information department says people are too afraid of doing anything that risks arrest and intirogate.

"People do not dare to talk about politics because they don't want to get into trouble with the military government. In our culture, family depends on the head of the household. If they are arrested and put in jail, it causes so many problems for the livelihood of the family."

According to a Human Right Watch report on Burma constitutional referendum, the SPDC uses many state controls organization to monitor the population, and to create persuasive climate of fear. "Various security agencies, including the Special Branch police and Military Intelligence, normally in plainclothes, frequent any area of potential dissent, such as teahouse, guesthouses, markets, and shops, monitoring the conversations taking place and collecting intelligence from informers."

Zarganar, a comedian was arrested for speaking to the international media. He is still in detention and no one knows where he is held. He had been constantly detained for handing out alms to protesting monks in the September 2007 protest and help victims of Cyclone Nargis.

- is a crime

The United Nation Special Rapporteur to Burma, on 7 March 2008 reported on the Draconian nature of Burma censors. “The Press Scrutiny and Registration Division of the Ministry of Information examine every publication for anything perceived to be anti-regime. Similar censorship boards exercise tight control over art, music, film and all other forms of artistic expression.”

After, what many international governments and the human right organization called a sham ratification of the new Burma constitution, the general election is going to take place in 2010. Under the new constitution; Chapter 8, Article 354, freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association are guaranteed unless it does not hurt the vague clause “National security, prevalence of law and order, community peace-tranquility and morality”.

And if that is not enough, the government can always rely on SLORC Order No. 2/88, which remain in force, that bans gathering and walking, delivering speeches,...in a group of five or more people... regardless of whether the act is with the intention of creating a disturbance or of committing a crime or not. The NLD-LA information department says a gathering person to make speeches in Burma is impossible.

“Mobilizing people inside Burma is tightly restricted

by the authority. In many areas, they [regime] even close down the National League for Democracy (NLD) offices and there is nothing we can do. This means we have no freedom of assembly and freedom of association with the people.”

In Burma, even a social gathering with friend or colleagues to celebrate is cause for harassment. The government uses group such as Union for Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) to disturb or cause fight. USDA was set by the government to spy on people, harass, intimidate political opponent and stage pro-government rallies.

NLD-LA information department says the NLD have been challenged by SPDC officer, in plainclothes, for a fight while they were celebrating the anniversary of the election on May 27 in their headquarter compound.

“An Officer wearing civilian clothes came and shouted at the people in the celebration from the front door saying “come out if you dare to fight one by one”. This is very aggressive.”

Burma has one of the worst records of human rights violations. In spite of the regime committed to numbers of treaty and agreement to improve its human right record, they hardly implement what is written in the agreement. They rather use it for releasing international pressure on them or as a show.





Forced to vote

In early May Cyclone Nargis battered Burma's Irrawaddy Delta and the outer suburbs of Rangoon, killing tens of thousands of people and destroying villages and livestock. Rice crops were ruined by salt water floods. Families were shattered, children were drowned, their small bodies left to rot. The military government did all it could to prevent international aid workers and donated supplies from reaching those in desperate need. Yet the government insisted on holding its sham referendum vote on the national constitution. *Inside News* spoke to Naw Moo from Ler Doh Township, one of the villagers forced to vote in the referendum.

Naw Moo said villages under the control of the Burma army soldiers were made to vote. There was no exceptions, even old people, unable to physically go to the voting stations, had to have a representative vote for them.

Naw Moo says authorities victimized those who didn't vote by imposing restrictions on them.

"The authorities went to the villages to register all of us over 18 for the vote. They punished villagers from

Per Dae Kaw, Baw Ka Hta, Ma Pe for not voting in the referendum. They were not even allowed to go to their farms to work or harvest their food."

Naw Moo witnessed and heard of vote rigging by officials.

"One of my friend's saw officials take [voting] papers and cast extra votes. Villagers name and ID number were given to the officials so they could not vote 'no', they had to vote 'yes'."

Naw Moo says villagers are afraid the authorities will cause problems for them if they vote 'no'."

Villages in Kyaukgyi, were also punished by the authorities. Villagers were ordered to provide seventy pairs of bulls to be sent to the Delta.

"People are worried. They are poor and can't afford to pay for seventy pairs of bulls."

Naw Moo said they had to borrow money to pay for the officials extortion demands and to avoid further problems.

"Villagers have a lot of problems. The Burma army orders them to work for nothing. It doesn't matter if

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it is night or day. If the soldiers want something the villagers have to do it for them. If villagers cannot do what is ordered of them they will have many problems and will be persecuted.”

Naw Moo says the situations in Kyaukgyi Township in Nyaunglebin district is getting worse.

“Villagers who lived in P’ Na Ner , Hee Poe Der, Taw Ku, Nu Po, Thoo Ker Bee, Ma Taw Ku, Aung So Moe, Pay Du, Sar Lae villages were forced by the army to relocate. The villagers stayed in other village without house so it was very difficult for them. Many villagers want to rebuild their house using materials from their old house,s but the army won’t allow it.”

Naw Moo says villagers are not allowed them to travel to work in their gardens.

“Villagers have plantations of betel, coffee, fruit and nut trees. Villagers have to get permission t travel from the Burma army and have to pay 5000 kyats a month for each document. We are not allowed to stay overnight.”

Naw Moo says the forced relocation means many children are missing out on getting a education.

“Children should study but they can’t, because their parents are forced to relocate. Many children are growing up but they don’t know how to read or write their own language.”

Auntie Naw Moo says.

“ I worry for the future of Karen children. but I can do nothing.”



Continue from page...3

almost 3000 acres were damaged and rice stores destroyed by the cyclone.

“We don’t have any food. In our area almost all the farmland can’t be worked on. Paddies, for seed and for food, are all gone. Our farmers don’t have any food for this year, we can’t continue to work on the field.”

Saw Kaw Ku also talks about the lack of government aid getting to their village tract.

“The military governments gives support to some people. They provided villagers with tractors, but it was not enough for us. They gave six tractors to each village tract but they didn’t give us enough patrol to use them. We have 13 villages in our tract and it has caused arguments who will use them first.” Saw Kaw Ku said they villagers should begin farming during June and July.

“If we miss these two months it will become a big problem during the monsoon period. Our farms will flood. It will not easy to grow enough food.”

Saw Kaw Ku says it will take time for the land to recover.

“Many be it will take two or three years for the land to regain its fertility and to harvest as much as we did before. After the cyclone, the government insisted our farmers should stand on their own feet foot. If it is the way, we, farmers will face many difficulties in the future.”

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Saw Tar Doe Muu said the ceremony was to honour the fallen soldiers and leaders, who have died this year.

“We take pride for the sacrifices of the husbands and sons of these family members and we pledge to continue their unfinished task in the presence of the family members. We vow their sacrifices, their blood and sweat will not be in vain. We will march towards victory in unity. This is our objective and intention of holding this ceremony.”

On August 12, 1950, the Burmese army murdered Saw Ba Oo Gyi, the founding leader of the Karen movement, at Taw Ko Koe village in Kawkareik Township, Karen State, dumping his body at seas and denying the Karen people a grave for their martyred leader.

Since then the Karens have observed the day as a martyr’s day to remember and to honor Saw Ba Oo Gyi and other fallen heroes and leaders.

Regime claims referendum vote a success

Burma's military regime announced on Thursday May 29, 2008, that the national referendum vote for the constitution had been ratified, claiming that a staggering 92.4 percent of voters voted yes in favor of the constitution. The regime claimed this as another positive accomplishment on their so-called 'democracy roadmap'.

The national referendum was held while Burma faced its worst natural disaster. Cyclone Nargis had just killed tens of thousands of people, leaving many more homeless. In spite of the devastation, the regime ignored the pleas of the international community to postpone the vote.

However, not all observers believed the regime's voting figures and are skeptical of their claims.

Human Right Watch in their latest report says; "...the conditions for the May referendum do not allow them [people] an informed and free choice. Most Burmese have not even seen the draft constitution, a 194-page document (in Burmese and English and in none of the minority languages) that was released only a month before the referendum and is only available for purchase in some bookshops."

Voters say it was obvious the regime cheated to get 'yes' votes.

Saw K' paw Htoo 24, a villager from Htee Mu Hta village in Kawkreik Township explained how the cheating process worked in his village.

"What they [government officials] did in our village was easy. Villagers were ordered to queue to with

their identity card. Two officials sat at a table recording their names. After villagers gave them their names and identity card numbers, they were told that it's done, they had voted 'yes'. There were no ballot boxes and no papers."

Human Right Watch says.

"In most rural areas, the lack of information about the draft constitution coupled with the tight control exerted by local officials and the military over the local population will effectively deny the local population the opportunity to cast a free and informed vote."

Saw K' paw Htoo said that he didn't give his name and many other eligible voters in his village didn't go to the meeting. Only between 30 to 40 percent of the people turned up at the meeting.

"Many villagers who are busy with their work didn't go to the meeting. There are about 400 households in our village and only about 150 households went to the meeting."

While official figures had shown overwhelming endorsement for the constitution, many villages in rural areas didn't get a chance to make decision and vote for their own choice.

Despite severe criticism from the regime's political opponents, human rights groups and the international community, the military regime says the new constitution has been ratified and a general election will follow in 2010.





Big Losses of a life

In early of May, Cyclone Nargis destroyed many part of Burma. The Irrawaddy Delta townships of Labutta were right in the cyclone's path. Most of the area was destroyed damaged by Nargis.

Then Kyaw Ko village lost everything. No house stood standing after the storm. Out of a population of 500 only 100 survived.

Saw Ler Lah a survivor says villagers are still facing life-risking problems; food supplies are destroyed and there is no shelter.

Saw Ler Lah, 47, years.

"My mother, my younger sister, my nephew and niece are all dead. Our 20 buffalos and our rice barn with 3,000 sacks of paddy [rice] are all destroyed. The church and school are all gone, taken by the cyclone. Bigger villages than ours were also destroyed.

Saw Ler Lah says the village has received no help from the government.

"We have to eat wet and rancid rice with salty

water, and we think that if we have to live on food like this we will soon die. We received only help from a Chinese woman who gave us one and half sacks of rice."

Saw Ler Lah says the villager's are in urgent need of food supplies, shelter, clothes and medicines.

"We had to move. Two weeks after Nargis hit our village we left for Pathein. If we stayed in our village for one more month we would have starved to death. Religious communities take good care of us and they provided us with blankets, mosquito nets, food and shoes - they gave us everything we needed."

The Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB) reported that the Irrawaddy division is Burma's rice bowl - it produces about 65 percent of the country's rice - next year could be disastrous.

"The already unstable political atmosphere may progressively worsen through the scarcity of rice and the escalation of rice prices."



Photo: KHRG

We don't have a choice

Uncle Saw Poe Gay, 40, from Khay Hta village is a proud man that never wanted to leave his village. He didn't want to stay in a Thai refugee camp. But now he has no choice. Burmese army burnt down his village and destroyed all his possessions.

"The soldiers attacked our village and murdered people for no reason. We had to run dodging bullets to get out of the village. Many children were crying and afraid of the soldiers".

Saw Poe Gay says he is one of the lucky ones.

"We had to dart between bullets many times, but luckily we survived and my family is safe. After the destruction of our village, I faced many problems. I do not have enough rice to feed my family. We had no choice, we fled to Jumalay Der village. I stayed in this village for several months, but the Burmese

army continued to attack our people."

Saw Poe Gay says he had to leave because of attacks.

"The troops continued their operation, so our family left for Mae Ra Ma Luang refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border. It took us three days to reach the camp. On the way we had to cross the army's car road. We crossed at night but it was still dangerous. After Saw Poe Gay left Jumalay Der he heard villages were still being attacked.

"I know if the Burmese army come and stay near our village it would be hard for villagers to travel and to farm. If we can't farm we have many problems. We don't want to leave our land and come to a refugee camp. But we have many problems if we stay."

UN – it's time to act (again)

Tomas Ojea Quintana, the newly appointed United Nations human rights special rapporteur for Burma will have his work cut out for him to try to shift the military government towards a more civil society.

Quintana went to Rangoon in early August on a mission to meet with senior government officials, ethnic groups and political parties in a bid to open talks with the generals on improving human rights.

Quintana was not allowed to visit Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, but did meet with five political prisoners held at Insein Prison. They included; Win Tin, a 78-year-old journalist, the country's longest-serving political prisoner, labor activist and Kyaw Kyaw, Buddhist monk Gambira, who helped lead mass anti-government protests violently suppressed by the military last September. The two other

jailed activists who spoke with Quintana were, Su Su Nway, Thurein Aung, labor activists sentenced to 28 years in prison last year for organising a May Day event.

The UN's past record on Burma is dismal. Attempts at diplomatic talks with the military regime over the last 18 years have achieved nothing. In that time the number of Burma's political prisoners has increased to 2,000, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is still under house arrest, forced labor is used to build roads, bridges and hotels, villagers are forced from their homes by Burma's army and a third of that army is made up of children.

If Tomas Ojea Quintana is to make any headway he has to be tougher with the regime and do better than the UN's Ibrahim Gambari, who was treated with disdain and contempt by the generals.



KNU vows to fight on



The Karen National Union paid respect to their fallen heroes at a ceremony to commemorate their 58th Martyrs Day. In the last 18 months the Karen leadership has lost three of their key politicians; General Bo Mya, Pado Mahn Sha and Pado Ba Thin have all died since December 2006.

In spite of their losses, the KNU vowed to carry on their struggle for self-determination against the Burmese military dictatorship and follow the legacy of their dead leaders.

The Martyrs Day ceremony was attended by several of the current KNU leaders including Saw Tamalabaw, Chairman of the Karen National Liberation Army, Chief-of-Staff Major General Mutu Saypho and the KNU General Secretary Pado David Tharkapaw.

The KNU leadership insisted they remain strong, committed and determined to continue their fight for political freedom.

A KNU spokesperson told reporters that the KNU will follow the same line and policy of our past leaders.

“We will keep up their fine tradition to continue our struggle until victory is ours. The KNU has suffered

loses before because of traitors that broke away from the Karen cause, but our revolution will not falter because of these opportunists.”

In a unified show of strength the ceremony the KNU's Pa-An district Chairman Pado Ah Toe, the 7th Brigade Commandant Major General Thura Johnny, township level leaders and more than 800 people paid their respect.

In recent years the death the KNU, has faced severe internal conflicts.

The signing of an independent ceasefire agreement between Major General Htain Maung, a former leader of the KNU's 7th Brigade, and the Burmese military regime in 2007 initially confused rank and file supporters and soldiers. But little was achieved for Karen villagers by Htain Maung's move. A Karen soldier told Inside News.

“It was stupid. He gained nothing. The old general was given 20-kilometres of worthless land for selling the Karen revolution to the military regime.”

More of a loss to the Karen people was the murder of their internationally respected leader, Pado Manh Sha who was shot by unknown gunmen at his house in Mae Sot.

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Regime punish no voters

Burma's military government claimed the national referendum vote for their constitution was a resounding success; saying more than 90 percent of people supported it.

But many villagers say the facts behind the regime's success tell a different story. Villagers spoken to by Inside News allege the regime cheated and bullied their way through the referendum.

Saw Ber Htoo, a district coordinator for the Committee of Internally Displaced Karen People says in Nyaunglein district that more than 200 villagers who disobeyed the regime's orders to vote 'yes' had to leave their village and take refuge in the mountains.

"The Burma army soldiers told villagers that if they do not go to vote 'yes', they would be fined 100,000 Kyat and [sentenced] to three years in jail. The villagers disobeyed and said they are not going even if they have to pay a fine and go to jail."

After villagers' refusal to vote, soldiers restricted their travel and forced them to work as unpaid laborers. Saw Ber Htoo says villagers are now struggling and

have nowhere to live.

"Villagers from these areas have been forced to relocate several times and they do not have land where they live to grow food. They have to forage for food from the jungle."

Saw Ber Htoo says villagers who stayed are worst off.

"They're not allowed to go out of the village. The soldiers forced them to work; carrying supplies, building the army camp, collecting wood and bamboo and digging trenches for the soldiers."

Saw Ber Htoo says this happen more in village tracts where people didn't vote 'yes'.

"The Burmese army officially didn't have to say this is the punishment for not going to vote, but it is obvious because of the increase in forced labor and restrictions on villages that didn't vote."

The villagers force to leave are now living in IDPs camps in the jungle and being looked after by the Karen National Union district and township officials but they are low on food and live in fear of attack from the Burma army.





Working for the people

Back pack health worker, Saw Shwe Htun Kyaw, 25, dreams of the day he can build a long-term clinic for Karen villagers.

“There’s need for what we do. We try to give villagers health care and education, but everytime we get a clinic up and running the Burmese army destroys it.”

Saw Shwe Htun Kyaw says with the instability caused by the army attacks there is no time to develop health systems.

“We’re always on the move to different hiding places. People mainly die because we see them late. People suffer at home rather than risk traveling through army checkpoints. We treat many children for malaria.”

Saw Shwe Htun Kyaw was once a soldier.

“I stepped on a landmine. I lost my lower leg and foot. I trained as a medic to help my people.”

Heavy rain clatters against the thatched leafed roof. Villagers scuttle under plastic sheeting. Mud turns

greasy in the monsoon downpour.

Saw Shwe Htun Kyaw explains the constant attacks from Burmese army soldiers on Karen people has created a huge health problem.

“The only relief from the attacks comes when the rains fall. The Burmese soldiers stay in their camps. But they people suffer from malaria, respiratory infections and dengue fever. We treat at least 30 people a day here.”

Saw Shwe Htun Kyaw works without regular pay.

“I enjoy my work, there’s a need for what we do. I get pocket money sometimes, but I do this work for my people.”

Saw Shwe Htun Kyaw is desperate for the fighting to stop in Karen State.

“The killing has to stop. Our people are forced to live in jungle hideouts with access to health or schools. I hope and pray there will no more fighting, otherwise how can our people progress.”