

EMBARGOED UNTIL 27 February 2009 10.00 hrs BKK

Report Calls For Burma's Leaders to be Investigated for Human Rights Abuses Over Nargis Response

Bangkok, Thailand (27 February 2009) – Burma's ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) should be referred by the United Nations Security Council for investigation by the International Criminal Court for its human rights abuses in the wake of Cyclone Nargis last year, the first independent report assessing the response to the disaster says.

The report, *After the Storm: Voices from the Delta*, released today says the SPDC obstructed relief to victims of the cyclone, arrested aid workers and severely restrained accurate information in the wake of the worst natural disaster to befall modern Burma.

The report charges these abuses may constitute crimes against humanity through the creation of conditions whereby the basic survival needs of victims cannot be adequately met, "intentionally causing great suffering, or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health," violating Article 7(1)(k) of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Professor Chris Beyrer, Director of the Center for Public Health and Human Rights at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, says the report findings are evidence of a wide array of abuses perpetrated by the ruling State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in the response to a disaster which is in violation of international humanitarian relief norms and legal frameworks for disaster relief.

"The people of the Delta told us how the Burmese military regime hindered cyclone relief efforts, confiscated aid supplies and land, and used forced labor, including forced child labor, in its reconstruction efforts. However, the report also illustrates the impressive capacity of ordinary Burmese citizens to assist their neighbors in a timely fashion, even as their Government makes such efforts more difficult," noted Dr. Beyrer.

The May 2008 disaster was estimated to have resulted in the loss of nearly 140,000 lives and affected millions of Burmese, particularly in the Irrawaddy Delta.

Interviews with ninety private relief workers and survivors conducted between June and November 2008 detail ongoing shortfalls in meeting basic needs of food, water, and shelter, the misappropriation, theft, and sale of relief supplies by Burmese authorities and human rights abuses of cyclone victims including forced relocation.

The report was jointly released by the Center for Public Health and Human Rights of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and the Emergency Assistance Team -Burma (EAT), a border-based social organization staffed by community aid workers from cyclone affected areas in Burma.

EAT Chairperson and renowned humanitarian Dr. Cynthia Maung appealed to the international community to more carefully review the political reality in the delta region in the military-ruled country before further assistance is delivered.

“The open engagement of community based organizations is essential to effectively implement sustainable recovery and rebuilding efforts in the region. It is inhumane that Burmese people have been jailed for offering charitable assistance and comfort to their suffering countrymen.”

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