

May 14, 2008

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi The Honorable John Boehner
The Honorable Harry Reid The Honorable Mitch McConnell

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader Boehner, Majority Leader Reid,
Ranking Member McConnell:

We are writing to express our extreme concern for urgent congressional action to help the Burmese people in the wake of Cyclone Nargis. As many as two million people could be directly affected by the storm, and they are now in desperate need of clean water, shelter materials, food, medicines and mosquito nets. Thirty-five percent of Burmese children already suffer from malnutrition, which will now increase their risk of diarrhea and upper respiratory infections. Exposure to the elements will further put them at risk of disease. Pre-cyclone conditions ranked Burma as one of the poorest countries in the world. 90% of Burma's population survives on \$1 a day, and the storm affected area is one of the country's most impoverished regions. Those who have lost their homes, crops, and means of livelihood will shortly be dependent on international assistance. Without it many will die.

We strongly urge the inclusion of specific targeted funding for humanitarian relief in Burma in the upcoming supplemental spending bill. We appreciate the increased funding included in the House mark for the International Disaster Assistance account for ongoing emergencies around the world, including the global food crisis. However, with Cyclone Nargis, this account is at risk of being spread dangerously thin without additional targeted resources for the Burma response. Therefore it is vital that during House floor consideration of the emergency supplemental, more resources are added to the recommended funding level for International Disaster Assistance to meet the devastating needs and that the Senate provide equally robust IDA funding sufficient to address the global food crisis, the dire needs in Burma, and the continuing emergency needs in other crises around the world. We call upon the Congress to make it possible for the U.S. to provide this needed emergency assistance to the people of Burma who have been struck by one of the most serious natural disasters in the history of their country.

We applaud the quick action by the Administration in pledging \$16,250,000. But the scope of this tragedy will require larger U.S. assistance and a long-term commitment to the stabilization and reconstruction of disaster-affected regions of Burma. The American people traditionally show strong support for assistance to those in dire need, regardless of their nationality, religion or form of government. After Hurricane Mitch, the tsunami in Southeast Asia in 2004 and the earthquake in Pakistan in 2005, Congress passed supplemental spending bills that authorized multi year commitments of funds for the emergency response, and we feel a similar commitment is needed for Burma.

The needs in Burma are extreme. The United Nations has released its first flash appeal for \$187 million, and it is clear that this is an initial appeal. As the United Nations response team completes its disaster assessment, we will have a fuller understanding of the scope of the needs. At this time, it is vital to ensure that USAID has the means to respond expeditiously as capacity on the ground improves. We urge the Congress to act now to make it possible for the US to quickly respond to this tragedy.

Sincerely,

American Refugee Committee

Congressional Hunger Center

Friends Committee on National Legislation

Global Health Council

Habitat for Humanity

Hands on Disaster Response

International Medical Corps

International Relief and Development

International Rescue Committee

Lutheran World Relief

Mercy Corps

PACT

Plan USA

Relief International

Refugees International

Salvation Army World Service Office

Save the Children

Stop Hunger Now

Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children

World Emergency Relief