



American
Public Health
Association

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Protect, Prevent, Live Well

July 7, 2008

Kyaw Tint Swe
Ambassador/ Permanent Representative
Permanent Mission of the Union of Myanmar to the United Nations
10 East 77th Street
New York, N.Y. 10021

Dear Ambassador Swe,

On behalf of the American Public Health Association (APHA), I write to express our empathy with the people of Myanmar following the humanitarian and public health catastrophe brought on by Cyclone Nargis. We are concerned about the devastating impact caused by the delays in allowing humanitarian aid and aid workers to reach the people of Myanmar. Founded in 1872, APHA is the oldest and most diverse organization of public health professionals in the world and has a long-standing commitment to promoting global health and protecting the health of all citizens of the world from preventable, serious health threats.

As public health professionals, we are deeply familiar with the requirements of an effective response to disaster, which include access of aid workers for appropriate assessments and immediate development of strategies to address needs, free access of aid to the communities and regions affected, and government action that takes all needed steps to ensure an effective response.

APHA supports access to the Irrawaddy Delta for international aid workers and agencies from the many nations around the world that have offered their professional and commodity assistance. Although we are pleased that in recent days, your government has begun to allow more thorough access of humanitarian aid, the many restrictions it places on humanitarian access, travel and allowed assistance is hampering the humanitarian response and putting the lives of those in need of assistance at serious risk. We are also disturbed by reports that people are being forced back into their home communities before there is adequate food, shelter, clean water, or sanitation.

More than one month after the devastating cyclone, the [United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs](#) (OCHA) estimates that only 1.3 million of the 2.4 million Burmese affected by the cyclone have received the help they need. Official figures show the number of dead and missing at 130,000 people. [Medecins Sans Frontières](#), which has 43 international staff and over 1,200 national staff currently working in Myanmar, is treating cases of fever, respiratory tract infections and diarrhea. They report that they are still treating injuries suffered as a result of the cyclone, such as bone fractures, head wounds and infected wounds.

In addition to full-scale relief, there is urgent need for early economic recovery efforts, especially in the agriculture and fisheries sectors, to support livelihoods. Timely assistance now will help feed the population in coming months and greatly reduce future costs. The [UN](#)

[Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon](#), expects the relief effort will need to continue for at least six months, as the global community helps feed and care for those who have lost everything.

We appreciate the pledge of the Government of Myanmar at the highest level to accelerate the incorporation of international assistance into the relief effort. We recognize that there has been an improvement in the number of visas granted to foreign specialists, for example, and we encourage these efforts to continue in order to allow international aid workers access to the many areas in need of assistance.

APHA strongly encourages the Myanmar government to remove the limits and conditions to access to aid that are inconsistent with requirements of public health and an effective humanitarian response. Again, we express our empathy with all the people of Myanmar in getting through these difficult times.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Georges C. Benjamin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Georges" being the most prominent.

Georges C. Benjamin, MD, FACP, FACEP (Emeritus)
Executive Director