

Date: May 23, 2008 6:20:41 PM PDT
From: WarringLtd@aol.com
Subject: Myanmar Update

To Rotarians – Family – Friends:

Dateline Yangon, Myanmar: Second dispatch from “Blind Rotarian Standing Beside Disaster Elephant” May 22

While the Yangon capitol very slowly regains its footing with improved operational infrastructure, its people remain shell-shocked over the cyclone cataclysm, the city continues largely dark at night, and many businesses, including restaurants, are yet damage-closed. The Yangon riverbank harbor dock area was destroyed; many ships and boats sank.

Progress includes more relief-supply airlifts arriving daily, but with Disaster Central in the Irrawaddy Delta just south of here strictly closed to all foreigners. Western print media have been suppressed since last Thursday due to uncomplimentary exposition. Therefore, you’re reading what we’re not!

However, I can share a good bit of what’s going on “on the ground,” who’s doing it, and some ways you might help. First, Rotary did land the first 1035 shelter boxes here last Friday, and they were delivered at once to the disaster zone, by two private contract businesses based in Yangon with close ties to Rotary colleagues and also acceptable to the government. I’ve verified that these reached their destinations, and intended donees, at the weekend. And, it was so well-handled by our Rotary colleagues that Rotary received favorable television and print coverage never, ever before accorded our organization here before; in many ways, a “10-strike” for all concerned.

Sadly, I’ve learned there was one rather large downside for the recipient victims: while the boxed supplies were a great help, the tents themselves are only functional on not inundated ground, absent elevated platforms!

Rotary II: Our now three-year-plus initiative with Myanmar Compassion Project continues construction of self-contained water systems at two more orphanages. By next month, we will have completed five separate orphanage projects – just 55-60 more to go! (we will do it). This week, I’ve personally inspected and use-tested each of the three site-systems we built last December, and all are being properly maintained and operating flawlessly.

Rotary III: Deploying most of the Thai Baht 105,000 generosity of Pattaya Rotarians, we oversaw purchase and operational installation of three powerful 6.5kv diesel generators to pull large flows of water from beneath orphanages with unusually deep, large water reservoirs; enough to serve their entire surrounding village communities suffering severe water shortfalls. Remaining about 10 percent will go to direct food aid.

Rotary IV: Sug Kitahara, 29-year-old President of Cerritos Rotary arrived Tuesday; he will be followed here this weekend by Jan Von Koss of Pattaya-Jomtien Rotary, our super-talented video documentarian, and Sue McGinnis of the Rotary East Asia Expansion Committee.

Now, let’s further address who’s effectively doing what here now and how to help them. First you need to recognize that, because of the draconian government restrictions on disaster area access, the best real help is from non-official Burmese volunteers. For example, a close friend and key permanent member of my Myanmar project team last weekend organized from the local business community US \$80,000 in cash donations, secured three large trucks and purchased food-stuffs and other life-necessities including water-purifying tablets, and went deep into the delta. My 17-year-old “adopted” Myanmar son, our team photographer, participated, and, though a strong person, came back rather traumatized for a few days by the sights, sounds and smells they all experienced. Both of them captured many digital still images within the “closed” area, which we have. Already, my team-mates have trucked down on a second such mission this week.

Careful vetting I’ve done here the past week, virtually unanimously pushes four relief organizations here to the forefront: especially Save

The Children – well established throughout the world, they've served Myanmar's kids since 1995. Consistently, Save The Children has reached the hardest places here with what's needed first. Their consistent results have earned an extraordinary trust by even this obtuse government. Amidst maelstrom here, Save The Children Country Director Andrew Kirkwood gave me a full half-hour in a Monday personal meeting and told me how they're doing it.

With a Burma staff of 400, he temporarily furloughed, with pay, about 260 of his staff of nationals, each with deep roots in a respective, cyclone-leveled delta community. Thus freed, they returned to their homes, assessed real needs and, with their employers' and other support, are delivering exactly the help needed where they are. Ingenious.

Please access the SaveTheChildren.org website. Andrew Kirkwood assures me that donations to Burma aid can actually best be made in your own country through the respective website, with full accountability and deductibility for the donor.

Very early arrival of monsoon rains here now greatly complicates both disaster aid and rescue operations, as well as daily life here. Torrential rains flooded some major city streets to as deep as three feet and heavy rainfall continued Tuesday, lessening Wednesday.

Tuesday, I spent two hours at United Nations headquarters here. In a scene of "ordered pandemonium," many hundreds of talented specialists from multiple nations throughout the free world are converging to help coordinate aid to the disaster area. None of these still are allowed to enter the totally restricted area, save for Burmese nationals, so these must be recruited to go into the region while UN agencies plan, direct and respond by "remote control" as best they can. It's all like something out of a Franz Kafka novel. UN Undersecretary for Relief Affairs, John Holmes, was helicoptered into the area Tuesday, but under a strictly military-controlled escort. We have it here that UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon is expected here Friday to focus further global pressure on the desperate need, but I and others I respect here believe nothing will change.

The best (and only) way to help these hurting, desperate refugees in their own land still is to transfer hard funds to the private charitable entities which have the continued ability to field knowledgeable and trustworthy locals into the Irrawaddy Delta on a continuing basis. Contributions to these are lawful, and tax-deductible.

Asia Heartbeat (Myanmar Compassion Project here) in Colorado Springs:
P.O. Box 63720
Colorado Springs, CO 80962-3720
Telephone: (719) 332-8172

Save The Children – globally at info@savethechildren.org

Rotary Myanmar Project c/o Maesai Rotary
Bangkok Bank Transfer Acct. # (to be supplied later)

Roman Catholic Missions to Myanmar, through Fr. Emile Louis-Tisserand,
email procupic@netvigator.com
or telephone in Hong Kong (852) 2849-8187 & 2849-8186

Best regards,

J.T. Warring