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Myanmar Disaster Teleconference

May 12, 2008

Co-Sponsors

Council on Foundations
Arabella Advisors (volunteering its services)

Moderator

Eric Kessler, Arabella Advisors, Principal and Managing Director

Speakers

Rashid Khalikov: United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), Director
Rein Paulson: World Vision, Senior Director for Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs
Sam Worthington, Interaction, President
Kurt MacLeod: PACT, Cambodia Regional Office Director

Disaster Recovery Fund

Arabella Advisors announces the establishment of the Disaster Recovery Fund which will support long-term recovery efforts. The Fund will be advised by experts in disaster recovery as well as leaders from the philanthropic community. For more information visit <http://www.arabellaadvisors.com> or email us at disasterrecoveryfund@arabellaadvisors.com.

Situation Report

Rashid Khahlikov, Director of United Nations for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) provided an up-to-date report from the UN of the situation on the ground in Myanmar.

- Nargis is the worst cyclone to hit Asia since 1991, when 138,000 people died in Bangladesh.
- **Affected:** The cyclone raged through the five divisions of Yangon, Irrawaddy, Bago, Mon and Kayin, which are home to nearly half of the country's 53 million people. It affected a population that was vulnerable to start with. One third of the population live below poverty line and one third of children below 5 are malnourished. It is now estimated by the UN that at least 1.2 to 1.9 people have been severely affected.
- **Death toll:** The official number of dead stands still stands at just over 22,119. The estimates of the various relief outfits on the ground range between 63,000 – 102,000.
- **Damage:** Assessments describe widespread destruction of housing and flooding, especially in delta areas, with contamination of a significant proportion of water sources. The UN estimates that 5,000 square kilometers were flooded.

- Needs: Pressing needs identified included food, water, water purification supplies and receptacles, sanitation facilities, including for shelter camps, roofing and construction materials, fuel, as well as essential medicines and treatment.
- Outward migration: Given the gravity of the situation including the lack of water and food, people are coping by migrating outwards from the most affected to less affected areas in search of the basic necessities.
- Fresh water: Lack of fresh drinking water is a crisis in Delta area. People are stranded in areas without fresh drinking water and without food or shelter.
- Diarrhea: Diarrhea outbreaks are a problem already, mainly in children, in Delta and also reported in the outer areas of Yangon.
- Dead bodies: There is growing concern for the management of dead bodies, and agencies are collaborating to support the IFRC and authorities to deal with this.
- Communication: Networks are still seriously compromised; however aid is slowly reaching the delta by air, road and waterways.

NGO Perspective

Rein Paulson, Senior Director for Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs for World Vision; Sam Worthington, President of Interaction; and Kurt MacLeod, Cambodia Regional Office Director of PACT, provided insights on the current situation and opportunities to help those affected by the cyclone.

We can draw lessons learned from other disaster relief efforts such as the tsunami, but not comparisons. While the numbers are difficult and sensitive to interpret, there is no doubt that this is a disaster of the highest magnitude. The numbers are large, whatever they may be. Myanmar is one of the poorest countries in the world, with one of the lowest life expectancies. However the Myanmar people are resilient, hard working, resourceful, and place a high value on honesty and respect. Given their local knowledge and existing access, community based organizations are the best suited entities to deliver services in response to the disaster.

- The NGO community is facing several issues:
 - Communications. Telecommunications within Myanmar are poor, making coordinated relief efforts difficult.
 - Access. The storm damaged roads that were in poor shape to begin with, making it difficult to reach those in need with supplies. Some roads are beginning to be cleared currently. Additionally, aid workers are facing difficulties in obtaining visas to enter the country. So far, the UN has been granted 34 visas for its employees. While it is beginning to improve, access to remote areas remains a barrier to relief efforts. The NGO community's capacity to respond to local needs is based on the ability to employ those already on the ground.
 - Price increases. Reports from in country are staple supplies such as water and rice are available for purchase. However, the cost of these supplies has reportedly increased 800-1000%, making it difficult for purchase.
 - Public health crisis. Prior to the cyclone, Myanmar already faced a significant public health crisis. The potential increases in water-borne illness and the spreading of infectious disease is aggravated by the lack of clean drinking water, poor sanitation and large gatherings of those who have lost housing.
 - Long term. Those who survived the storm will face many obstacles throughout the recovery efforts. There is a strong need to focus on the loss of income; one way to

do so is to hire these individuals to help with recovery efforts. Access to financial services will also play a critical role in the population's ability to recover in the long term.

The NGO Community is working together. Interaction, a membership organization of 165 NGO's, has 9 agencies and 2000 total personnel working on the ground in Myanmar in coordination with OCHA and the U.S. government. There are many additional workers ready to go, pending visas. The membership organization is currently looking into opportunities for cash investment into local groups that is in accordance with U.S. government restrictions. Interaction was set up 24 years ago and set up standards for best practices for humanitarian response. To be a member you must go through a rigorous assessment and certification process. Donors are encouraged to give to those NGO's who meet Interaction standards.

Issues related to the environment play a significant role in disaster prevention and disaster response planning. It is likely that the cutting of the mangroves for shrimp farming likely worsened the impact of this cyclone. NGO's are conscious of the connection between the environment and disaster response. Both environmental organizations and aid organizations are finding ways to work together to address this issues. It is clear the environment lies at the heart to any response and disaster mitigation.

Where and what should we donate?

Donors asked the speakers what supplies are needed on the ground.

- There is a shortage of temporary shelter supplies such as plastic sheeting.
- In addition to plastic sheets and other commodities, Kurt reminds us of the importance of cash. Cash is a good alternative and allows the local communities to determine what they need. Organizations working in microfinance would have the appropriate systems in place to get cash out to the local people.
- Eric Kessler suggests donors to look to their local community foundations, faith-based organizations, interaction members, and the Arabella Advisors Disaster Recovery Fund as places to give to.

Resources

www.Interaction.org

www.unfoundation.org

www.reliefweb.org

www.cidi.org

Sources for information on philanthropic efforts include the Council on Foundations (www.cof.org) and your local regional association of grant makers.

The United Nation's Myanmar Flash Appeal, presenting projects proposed by 20 humanitarian organizations with capacity on the ground, is accessible at:

<http://ochaonline.un.org/humanitarianappeal/webpage.asp?Page=1665>

The United Nation's Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to jump-start relief operations is accessible through the UN Foundation website or at: <http://cerf.un.org>

At the urging of many of Arabella's clients and other philanthropists Arabella Advisors has been in touch and based on the sound advice of community leaders such as John Davies, head of the Baton Rouge Area Foundation, we have established a **Disaster Recovery Fund**. This is a pooled fund for philanthropists who want their resources to be put towards the long-term recovery of the people, communities and environment of Myanmar. Disbursement of funds will be directed by Arabella Advisors' two disaster philanthropy experts, Ollie Davidson and Regine Webster, and will be guided by an advisory board representing the country's most significant donor networks, community foundations and corporate foundations. The resources in this fund will go to reputable agencies and organizations as the long-term needs of Myanmar are clearer and the nonprofit community is able to build long-term recovery strategies. For more information visit <http://www.arabellaadvisors.com/pages/MyanmarRecovery.html> or email us at disasterrecoveryfund@arabellaadvisors.com.