

Alert

Myanmar

Earthquake of 6.8 hits Shan State

Geneva, 31 March 2011

1. Brief description of the emergency

On 24 March 2011, an earthquake of magnitude 6.8 on the Richter scale struck at a depth of 10 km in the southern part of Shan State in eastern Myanmar close to the borders between Myanmar, Thailand and Laos. Six aftershocks have since been reported from the affected areas and the risk of landslides remains high.

According to initial information from ACT partners, villages in Tarlay Sub-Township (located in Tachileik Township), including Mong Lin (West), Mong Lin (East) and Naryaung Village Tracts, are among the most affected, with significant infrastructure damage. Tachileik Township is located near the border with Thailand and Laos—47 km from the epicentre, 1,292 km north east of Yangon and 940 km east of the capital city of Naw Pyi Taw.

2. Impact

The latest official number of casualties stands at 74 deaths and 125 injuries. An initial rapid assessment conducted by World Vision International (WVI) estimates that 95,000 people have been affected. According to the Relief and Resettlement Department around 304 houses have been significantly damaged including a number of Government buildings. Thirty-one religious buildings have been damaged as well as eleven schools. One 16-bed rural hospital in Tarlay was also damaged. The Tarlay Sub-Towship Relief Committee, established by the government, has estimated the damage caused by the earthquake at approximately 3 billion Kyats (approximately USD 3.6 million).

There have been reports of sporadic disruption of basic facilities, including electricity, water supply and telecommunications in the affected areas. As the rainy season is due to start in several weeks, there are reports that some of the affected areas are inaccessible due to rains and increased risk of landslides.

3. National and international response

The government has welcomed the support provided by humanitarian partners present in Myanmar and has identified remaining needs in food, shelter, health, water and sanitation. The Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) has established several relief distribution centres for affected people with the people returning home after receiving relief items.

The local authorities have deployed four assessment teams to conduct an assessment in seven locations—Ward 1, 2, 3, 4 in Tarlay Sub-Township; Nar Yawng Village Tract; Mong Lin (East) and Mong Lin

(West) Village Tracts. In cooperation with the local authorities, MRCS is also conducting an assessment in the same areas with 30 volunteers divided into six teams.

The UNICEF team has assessed 26 schools and found five fully collapsed and six damaged in Tarlay Sub-Township. The Ministry of Education is expected to have these schools rebuilt in time for the new semester, due to start in June.

MRCS will transport, by air, 300 tents (for temporary shelter) and 600 plastic mats for distribution in eight areas - Ward 1, 2, 3 and 4 in Tarlay Sub-Township; Nar Yawng Village Tract; Mong Lin (East) Village Tract; Mong Lin (West) Village Tract; and Kya Ku Ni Village in Tachileik Township. WV Myanmar has so far distributed 1,200 plastic tarpaulins (9 X 12 feet) in Tarlay and Mong Koe. An additional 2,253 heavy duty, plastic tarpaulins have been dispatched from Yangon.

A WV Myanmar assessment carried out on 29 March found that access to drinking water had been seriously disrupted due to damage to a number of pipes, tanks and wells. A risk of water contamination remains. Two water purification units have been distributed. Each unit can pump 400 litres of clean water/hour. UNICEF will send 80,000 water purification tablets and 500 sets of pipes (for latrines) to the affected areas.

4. ACT Alliance response

None of the members of the ACT Myanmar Forum have offices in the affected areas, but there are several local churches (non ACT members) that have offices and development programmes in the affected areas. Myanmar Baptist Convention (MBC) is providing, through its own resources, food for 588 households for a period of 10 days, and has also carried out an assessment of ten affected villages. Caritas - Switzerland is planning support through Karuna (Caritas Myanmar).

Beyond the assistance provided by MBC (see above) which is a partner of several members of the ACT Myanmar Forum, no assistance has yet been provided through the Forum.

5. Planned activities

At the moment Norwegian Church Aid has US\$25,000 immediately available and will perhaps respond through MBC depending on the needs and scale of the damage. However, more information is needed before a decision can be taken. Diakonia, Church World Service (CWS), DanChurchAid (DCA), Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and Christian Aid (CA), are also waiting for more information before making any decision.

Any funding indication or pledge should be communicated to Jean-Daniel Birmele, ACT Chief Finance Officer (Jean.Daniel.Birmele@actalliance.org).

Thank you for your attention.

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