

Myanmar

Bangkok, 21 May 2021

SITUATION

On the morning of Monday 01 February 2021, the government of Myanmar was thrown into a political crisis. The ensuing waves of mass protest grew increasingly violent. The political crisis resulted in a collapse of public services and widespread armed conflict, impacting the lives of people living in urban centres as well as remote rural villages.

Similar to the crowded festivals in neighbouring India, the huge gatherings of people during Myanmar's protests portend a massive increase in COVID-19 cases at a time when the health system is least prepared to handle it. Most health workers walked off their jobs in protest (or were fired) and COVID-19 testing decreased by 95% since the coup occurred. Without testing and case reporting data, the people of Myanmar will not know that they are in the midst of a serious outbreak until it is far too late.

Communities where many ACT Alliance partners are working face massive impacts as a result of the combined emergencies of armed conflict and COVID-19. Market systems and food production systems are disrupted due to movement restrictions imposed to prevent spread of COVID-19 and related to the conflict itself. In some parts of the country, farmers are not planting rice this monsoon season (May – October) because they fear that this substantial investment will just result in their crops being confiscated by the combatants. The banking sector has been severely disrupted and people are very cash poor. Food prices have started to skyrocket.

At the end of April 2021, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) highlighted the evolving cumulative socio-economic impact of the pandemic and the political crisis, warning that in a worst-case scenario close to half of the country could be living in poverty by the beginning of 2022, effectively reversing gains made over the preceding decade. From the perspective of ACT Partners and the communities whom they serve, this worst-case scenario seems the likely outcome. The coup and ensuing political crisis have contributed to an intensification of conflict. Tens of thousands of people have fled their villages and towns and are living in the forest under tarps (or in bomb shelters) and in informal displacement sites that lack the infrastructure and resources to provide basic assistance.

Cases of malaria have been reported among the displaced population sheltering in the jungle following the early arrival of the monsoons. Access to IDPs remains restricted due to ongoing fighting, remote muddy terrain, road blockages, and increasing landmine risks. Local partners and experts warn of a looming food security crisis if internally displaced persons (IDPs) are not able to return to their homes to tend to their crops and livestock. The full onset of the monsoon season in June will pose additional logistical challenges for humanitarian access.

NEEDS

The conflict has resulted in a state of crisis in ACT Alliance partner communities. Vital humanitarian needs such as food (rice, pulses, oil, and salt), shelter (tarpaulins), water treatment (e.g. Aquatabs), toilets, soap, sanitary pads, COVID-19 informational materials, and essential medicines (e.g. oral rehydration solution).

As of 01 June 2021, the situation has further deteriorated, and the needs have increased. Priority needs include food, shelter, and access to water and latrines. The lack of WASH facilities may lead to deadly diarrheal outbreaks and entire communities are vulnerable to COVID-19 because large numbers of displaced households are now sleeping together in crowded and poorly ventilated spaces such as churches and monasteries. As the needs grow, local responders are increasingly stretched and require additional financial support to reach the most vulnerable among displaced communities.

Certain populations are especially vulnerable, disabled, including the elderly, sick, pregnant women, and young children. These individuals will be assisted first.

STAKEHOLDERS

UN Agencies, including UNHCR and WFP are assisting with coordination and some provision of assistance, but this remains very inadequate. The rainy season and human conflict will impede access by large vehicles to most displacement sites.

Several INGOs are responding to the crisis and coordinating their efforts.

A large number of national and local NGOs are also responding to the crisis. These agencies have the best access for provision of humanitarian supplies to the affected communities.

Faith-based groups: Religious actors in Myanmar can often act as a neutral party in locally negotiating access and directly delivering relief. They are best aware of the local terrain and needs. They are also familiar with ACT Alliance operational modalities. ACT Alliance will implement through these local partners.

The UN estimates that between 30,000 to 40,000 people have been displaced in the areas reached by this appeal. They are dispersed across a wide geographic area and in a variety of settings including caves, bomb-proof holes dug into the ground, makeshift bamboo shelters in the jungle, churches, and monasteries.

Emergency response is currently being coordinated with support of the South-east Working Group led by UNHCR and UNDP, sitting under the Humanitarian Country Team (UNOCHA / UNHCR). This appeal will be implemented in close coordination with these mechanisms at the national and local levels.

ACT Alliance

ACT Alliance members proposes to raise an appeal to respond to the crisis.

Any funding indication or pledge shall be communicated to the Director of Operations, Nancy Ette (Nancy.ette@actalliance.org) and Head of Humanitarian Affairs, Niall O'Rourke (niall.orourke@actalliance.org) with a copy to the Finance Officer, Marjorie Schmidt (Marjorie.schmidt@actalliance.org).

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