

## XTRA MYANMAR CYCLONE

# FOLLOWING THE RELIEF ROUTE

Have you ever wondered where all the dollars you've donated go?

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IT HAS taken 30 years to build up trust and a working relationship with the ruling authorities, and finally, the long, slow nurturing has paid off for World Vision in Myanmar. Today, it is one of the rare relief organisations trusted by the junta to distribute aid directly to cyclone victims.

Amid reports that other aid groups are running into brick walls or have had their relief supplies allegedly hijacked by the military, this is an important assurance for donors eager to know that their hard-earned dollars have arrived safely where it is most needed.

For Singaporeans, this has been a major concern — especially since many had dug repeatedly into their pockets to contribute to disaster relief in both Myanmar and China.

But just exactly how does a donor dollar translate to crucial supplies like medicine, sanitation supplies, shelter and food?

To get a clearer picture, we decided to trace the logistic chain of one relief organisation that has been in Asia for as long as when the Boat People fled Vietnam amid storms and piracy and when Cambodia emerged from the darkness of the Pol Pot era.

Mr Tim Costello, chief operating officer of World Vision Australia, was one of the first on the ground after the ferocious Nargis left a trail of death and devastation on May 3. Considering that Myanmar visas have been so hard to get, the fact that he was allowed in was already a minor miracle.

Still, nothing prepared him for the vast destruction before him, even though he had seen the horrific visuals in the media. "It was extraordinary. Rows and rows of houses had their roofs taken off, or flattened. People were foraging for food in the flooded delta ... without aid.

"The government here believed they had the capacity to deal with this, but they do not."

Mr Costello said it was clear that three things were immediately needed — medicine, water and sanitation to prevent the outbreak of infectious diseases, followed by temporary shelters for the homeless.

For World Vision, it was all systems go from Day One at Ground Zero — US\$500,000 (\$685,256) was released immediately to the Myanmar office for emergency relief. With it, local staff scoured every possible source and cobbled



**RARE RELIEF**  
World Vision is one of the agencies trusted by the junta to distribute aid.

PHOTO COURTESY WORLD VISION

## A MILLION CHILDREN NEED URGENT HELP

In cyclone-hit Myanmar, children who are sleeping on the streets without adult protection are at risk of not only diseases but also sexual abuse, a Unicef spokeswoman warned on Friday.

"We estimate that 40 per cent of the hardest-hit people are children," said Ms Veronique Taveau of the United Nations agency for children. The agency estimates that 1 million children need "urgent assistance".

"Due to the destruction of homes and schools, children are sleeping on the streets, in the schools which are still standing or in monasteries, often without shelter from rain", said Ms Taveau.

This comes as health workers reported cases of the infectious and potentially deadly disease cholera in Myanmar.

Meanwhile, the World Bank pledged support for the Association of South-east Asian Nations (Asean) — which is convening a Special Foreign Ministers meeting

on Monday in Singapore — as it moves forward with its "Coalition of Mercy".

Asean Secretary-General Surin Pitsuwan and World Bank President Robert Zoellick met to discuss efforts to support the people of Myanmar. Mr Zoellick offered the Bank's expertise in assessing the devastation and planning for recovery.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has called for about 50 million Swiss francs (\$64.9 million) in funds to provide aid. The immediate priorities would be to scale up the provision of shelters and clean water.

The Singapore Red Cross said close to \$700,000 worth of emergency relief items were sent to Myanmar on Friday morning.

But Myanmar's junta still refuses to budge on accepting foreign relief workers, two weeks after the cyclone tragedy left more than 71,000 dead or missing.

Western diplomats said the junta would take foreign diplomats into the cyclone-hit Irrawaddy delta region on Saturday in the first such trip since the storm hit on May 2-3. — **AGENCIES**

together the "first" first-aid packages.

World Vision employs about 500 local officers, all involved in community programmes on child well-being, anti-child trafficking, nutrition and health, which includes helping the increasing numbers of HIV victims for the past three decades.

It is this long presence in the country that has earned it trust and respect.

Mr Richard Rumsey, World Vision's regional relief director for Asia-Pacific based in Singapore, is the man responsible for making sure donations go to the right places. The relief organisation has 18 support offices in Asia and Singapore is one of them.

"Accountability is very important. It is imperative that we deliver what we say and along the way keep the checks and balances." Mr Rumsey explained the process in detail.

All donations are channelled into World Vision's Global Fund, which is based in Monrovia, California. When disaster strikes, a contingency fund can be activated almost immediately.

About US\$18 million in aid from the

global fund was allocated to Myanmar. Some of it will come from donations made in Singapore. The fund is made up of a pool of donations World Vision administers out of its Monrovia headquarters.

Disaster relief funds are allocated a code and categorised according to the number of people affected.

For example, Cyclone Nargis is estimated to have affected 90,000 families with about 50,000 in Yangon and 40,000 in the Irrawaddy delta — a total of 450,000 people.

This is just the first phase. There is more to be done as Myanmar needs assistance along the road to the next phase — economic recovery. This may take another two to three years, Mr Rumsey said.

Which really means that every dollar donated really does go a long way.

In the interim, the country coordinator must put together a detailed proposal on how the aid money is to be used, where it will go and when it will be sent before the money is released. But how and who monitors where the funds go?

Frequent feedback and updates keep

track of finances and many expenditure reports make up a budget monitoring system. "The picture always changes fast and it is a fluid process that demands frequent reviews," said Mr Rumsey.

The situation in Myanmar now is "far from perfect", but Mr Rumsey told Weekend TODAY that World Vision has "signed an in-principle agreement with Myanmar's Department of Social Welfare that all aid brought in by World Vision will be distributed by World Vision".

In the meantime, World Vision will be sending in a shipment of water purification sachets, each of which can purify 10 litres of water at a time. Two million sachets of the disinfectant will be freighted over to Yangon by Silk Air. It will reach on Sunday and will translate to over 20 million litres of safe drinking water.

Since Cyclone Nargis hit, the number of victims has steadily risen and there are now up to 1.5 million people at risk. Safe drinking water is one of the most critical needs for the survivors.

Little sachets go a long way, especially in Myanmar.