

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515**

**STATEMENT OF  
THE HONORABLE ENI F.H. FALEOMAVAEGA  
CHAIRMAN**

**before the  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ASIA, THE PACIFIC, AND THE GLOBAL  
ENVIRONMENT**

**Burma in the Aftermath of Cyclone Nargis:  
Death, Displacement, and Humanitarian Aid**

**May 20, 2008**

On May 3, 2008, Cyclone Nargis hit Burma killing more than 100,000 people. According to the United Nations (UN), up to 2.5 million may be affected due to a shortage of food, fuel, clean water, and electricity.

While UN teams are on the ground, the military junta is delaying aid and imposing travel restrictions on those providing assistance. Our Congressional Research Service (CRS) reports that “despite pledges of cash, supplies, and assistance from around the world, most aid agencies have still not been granted visas to enter Burma and there is still no word on when visas might be issued.”

It is also reported that a relatively small number of foreign aid workers, mostly from Asian countries, will be allowed in but it is not clear how far outside Rangoon they will be allowed to travel because the military junta insists that they can “manage the relief effort and do not need experts.”

As of May 15, the international community had pledged more than \$60 million in contributions and in-kind pledges. Japan and the United Kingdom have provided \$10 million each, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) reports that total humanitarian funding provided by the U.S. is \$17.5 million, to date.

U.S. airlifts of relief materials are being flown from Thailand to Rangoon, and I want to commend our U.S. Ambassador to Thailand, Eric John, for the excellent work he is doing on behalf of the U.S. at this critical time. I also want to express my disappointment that the military junta proceeded with a vote on its proposed constitution

at a time when the Burmese people are desperately trying to hold on to life and recover from the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis.

While voting was delayed for most of the townships around Rangoon, and in seven of the townships in the Irrawaddy region, reports are swirling that the turnout for the rest of Burma was light and marred with voting irregularities including pre-marked ballots, voter intimidation, etc. On the other hand, the SPDC reports that more than 99 percent of eligible voters voted and that 92.4 percent voted in favor of the constitution drafted by the SPDC.

On May 6, 2008, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H. Con. Res. 317 in hopes that the Burmese government would call off the referendum and allow “all resources to be focused on disaster relief to ease the pain and suffering of the Burmese people.” I commend Congressman Joe Crowley for offering this important Resolution, of which I am a co-sponsor. While we remain on record in condemning the referendum going forward as scheduled, I am hopeful that the Burmese government will, at a minimum, make disaster assistance a top priority.

I also hope there might be more willingness on the part of key nations such as China, India, Russia, and the ASEAN countries to apply pressure on the SPDC to reduce human rights abuses and begin a dialogue with Burma’s opposition groups. To this day, Nobel Peace Prize recipient, Aung San Suu Kyi, remains under house arrest, and Prime Minister Sein Win, who is with us today, remains in exile. As an international community, we cannot turn a blind eye and pretend this is okay. To paraphrase Martin Luther King, the people of Burma “will remember not the words of [their] enemies but the silence of [their] friends.”

So while I applaud the efforts of the U.S. and the international community in bringing aid to the people of Burma, I would hope we would also apply more pressure on the SPDC to ensure a peaceful transition to democracy.

I now recognize our Ranking Member for any opening statement he may have.