



## Briefing on Relief Efforts to Burma and China

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**MR. CASEY:** Welcome, everybody, to Briefing Two of the day. Glad to have you with us. As you know, we wanted to provide you with an opportunity to hear directly from USAID Administrator Henrietta Fore about events in Burma and China. As you know, she has recently come back from Thailand and was, in fact, on our first U.S. relief flight going into Burma. So this is an opportunity for you to hear a little bit, firsthand from her, about her observations on the situation and, again, as well as get an update on how we're proceeding both to assist people there and the kinds of things that we have in mind to be able to support the people in China in the aftermath of the earthquake.

With that, now that we have everybody here, I'll turn the podium over to Henrietta.

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** Thank you, Tom. Thank you all for coming. And I'll begin with a brief oral statement and then we will go to Qs and As. And I have Ky Luu also here from the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance and Scot Marciel, who is our Ambassador to ASEAN, who was also with me on the trip into Rangoon.

I want to begin today with extending my deepest condolences to the people of China and to the people of Burma. The earthquake in China and tropical cyclone in Burma are the largest natural disasters that they have experienced in a generation. The extent of the devastation is vast, and the relief efforts require the cooperation and coordination of the entire international humanitarian aid community. USAID continues to focus our efforts on providing lifesaving assistance to both of these countries, and our hearts go out to all of those who are affected.

From the Government of China, we have reports that nearly 15,000 people were killed in Monday's earthquake in China, another nearly 26,000 individuals are presumed buried, more than 14,000 are missing and 67,000 injured. Chinese rescue teams are working hard to help those in need of assistance, but blocked roadways, severed communications, landslides and inclement weather conditions continue to prevent full access to the most effective efforts and areas, so they are hampering relief efforts.

USAID has provided an initial \$500,000 U.S. for the local purchase and distribution of emergency relief supplies to those in need. The United States Government will aggressively pursue public-private partnerships that could benefit the people of China in their hour of need. We have already heard from numerous concerned citizens and corporations wanting to assist the Chinese people. And we are hearing that numerous organizations, the American Red Cross and others, are already receiving many donations. We're hoping to build on many public and private partnerships and relationships and to create additional partnerships to assist in the current relief and recovery efforts. From relief commodities to expert disaster assistance personnel, we remain committed to providing assistance to the people of China.

Turning our thoughts to Burma, as you may know, I just returned from Bangkok where I flew with Admiral Keating -- Admiral -- pardon me, Ambassador Marciel and DART leader Bill Berger on the very first United States relief flight carrying relief supplies into Burma. Since Monday, an additional seven humanitarian assistance flights have flown in to Burma with supplies that could benefit up to 100,000 people.

The United States continues to urge Burmese authorities to allow international humanitarian community full access to the impacted areas in order to provide further lifesaving assistance. We also urge Burmese authorities to continue issuing visas to humanitarian assistance teams, including our USAID DART team, which is in Bangkok and prepared to move and provide much needed and expert assistance to the people of Burma.

The Burmese people are in need of everything: relief, technical experts, and above all, speedy delivery. We are continuing our aggressive efforts to make the Burmese authorities understand what is at stake, and that the solutions lie in the full force of the international relief community.

While I was in Bangkok, I had the opportunity to speak with some of the international and nongovernmental community who are involved in the relief effort. They are all interested in working together to quickly get aids into the hands of those most in need. USAID extends its support to those in the humanitarian assistance community, and we offer sincere thanks to all those who are working hard on the relief efforts both in Burma and in China.

We are increasingly concerned with reports of a new tropical depression. Heavy rainfall is forecast for the next three to seven days in Burma, which will only exacerbate conditions.

So now, let me turn to any questions that you might have and ask Ky and Scot if they would come join me up here. Thank you.

**QUESTION:** Can you -- Tom said earlier at the briefing that you planned to continue, if you are allowed, with these humanitarian flights without having anyone directly on the ground supervising the distribution and making sure it gets to the right people. With the reports that are coming out now of the aid turning up in the hands of these USDA guys who have been blamed for a lot of the violence against -- a lot of the repression, and reports that some of the stuff is ending up in markets for sale and reports that local population -- populations in need are getting kind of substandard local stuff while the higher-grade international relief assistance is going to the army, why are you going to continue those flights if you can't be assured that it's getting to the people who need it the most?

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** We've been carefully monitoring all of these reports and the Embassy on the ground has been seeking to verify and confirm these reports. And at the moment, we have been focusing very clearly on the humanitarian aspects. In talking to the NGOs in Bangkok who have staff in Burma, their sense is that there is a great deal of assistance that is getting through. As you know, we have already begun to program and assistance is moving. \$16.5 million worth, through the United Nations and nongovernmental partners who are currently working in Burma. So a great deal of our assistance is already moving. That is in addition to the commodities that are coming in by plane. But their request to us has been -- continually -- availability, access, and accountability. And that is what we are focusing on.

So we will continue to monitor daily. We do continual assessments to make sure the food is getting through to the people who need it. We will try to do on-the-ground assessments. But at this time, the needs are so immense, they are so large, that we're taking some risks to hope that we can get the assistance through to the ones who are most in need. There is an enormous humanitarian urgency to this effort.

**QUESTION:** So you're not concerned, or the concern that you might have about this, and about maybe actually bolstering or helping the military, the Burmese military rather than the people, is outweighed by your concern for those who are getting -- for the victims who actually are getting however much of the aid is getting through? That's --

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** Well, we share your concerns. I mean, we are being very hard-headed about this. We can see what the challenges are. All of our NGO

partners are aware of them. Many of them have been working in country for a good deal of time. And we are all concerned. We are all alert. The needs are so great. There are people who have been without water and without food for days now, and we are just focused on trying to save lives, to just keep people alive at this moment. It is -- there's just an urgency to the humanitarian side that is now. It's not five days from now. It's just now. So we're focusing on the humanitarian response, first and foremost, and trying everything we can to do to get accountability to work in ways that we always work very carefully with NGOs around the world.

**QUESTION:** And you said it was your sense that a lot was getting through, a lot of the aid. Can you quantify that in any way for us? I remember when the first plane went in, I think it was headed for Bogalay township. Did people come back to you and say, yes, you know, 8,000 water bottles arrived here and, you know, 1,500 blankets and 10,000 mosquito nets or -- I mean, can you quantify any of this for us?

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** When I was referring to the aid that's getting in, it's what we've been programming through our United Nations and nongovernmental partners, so it was not referring to that first flight. So it's not the commodities flight. It's our current assistance that is going through our nongovernmental partners as well as through the UN agencies. And that is moving. Our partners are reporting that it's moving. And you know our partners -- Save the Children and CARE and a wide -- American Red Cross and others.

**QUESTION:** I'm sorry -- are you saying that you don't have any evidence that the initial flight or that the seven that came after it, that that has -- that the material that was -- the supplies that were on those flights has actually gotten anywhere? You don't know that?

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** No, we've seen that the helicopters have gone out, so we have -- we know that. We have some reports on the ground that they have begun to see the supplies coming into the southern areas and to some of the villages and towns. But we don't have quantifiable numbers as yet as to how much has reached where from our NGO partners.

**QUESTION:** Someone at the UN yesterday, I think it was in Geneva, was suggesting that maybe there should be some forced operation to bring the aid inside the country, even by boat. Do you think it's something that you would consider?

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** This would be forced assistance that is brought in by boat without --

**QUESTION:** -- the consent of the --

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** -- the consent of the authorities in Burma. At the moment, we are not contemplating that.

**QUESTION:** But is it something that could be prepared or is it -- is the maritime -- is it something that would be possible to use the boats?

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** Well, I was with the Admiral of Pacific Command and we talked about how we might be able to address the most urgent needs, which appear to be water and food. And if this is the best way of getting food and water to the people in the southland, I think the Burmese authorities would be the ones who would request it, coming in by boat into those -- into that delta area. It is very difficult to get into that delta area by any other method than by water, by boat. There are many roads that are submerged and there are many villages that are difficult to reach. So we do have many nongovernmental partners that are -- that have small boats and that are using small boats. And I think it will be one of the many ways that food and assistance will be transported in the whole delta region.

**QUESTION:** What can you tell us about the outbreak of disease? There were some reports yesterday that cholera and malaria had been turning up. I mean, can you confirm that or what can you -- can you give us an update on what you're finding?

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** Well, we're concerned about it, but we do not have verification of outbreaks -- unless there's something new this morning that you know about? No. So we do not have confirmation. We do know there's dysentery. We are very concerned about all of the water-borne diseases that will increase as the rains increase and we are unable to get to people. One of the reasons we've sent in the insecticide-treated bed nets is to try to help as much as possible in malaria, so that is one of the areas that we are most concerned about now.

**QUESTION:** Could you take us a little bit inside your visit into Myanmar on your -- or to Burma, when you were meeting with the officials there? Who did you meet with? How did that meeting go? Since then, we've seen seven additional flights come in. Can we expect more? Have you received any assurances from them on that?

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** Let me begin with who we met with. We met with the commander-in-chief of the Burmese navy, the deputy foreign minister and the Burmese deputy minister of social welfare, as well as a number of other members of the authority. We spoke about the capacities that we had, both that the Admiral carries within Pacific Command that was at ready to be able to assist the Burmese people, and we also spoke about the DART team. Bill Berger spoke about what assets they can bring and what expertise they can bring to the situation. We were shown a map of the southern region of Burma, and the lay of the land and how difficult it is to be getting in, where they were most concerned, where they had visited, where they were moving relief supplies to at the present time, the areas they had concern, where they could use help.

They asked for help and we reviewed what we were hearing. Their first request was for water, potable water. That was the number one issue that they had with transportation of potable water to the many people in need. Food was second. Then we began talking about the need for shelter -- thus, the new plastic sheeting that came in on subsequent flights is important. We talked about malaria. We talked about the need for blankets and health supplies. It is an enormous challenge the number of displaced people who have left their fishing or farming communities and are now displaced. They talked about the challenges of trying to look after these people and they would welcome assistance and international relief.

**QUESTION:** And so -- further, can we see any -- do you see anything more down the road? I mean, do we expect additional flights tomorrow or the next day? And what's the channel of communications with the Burmese Government right now? Is there an open line where they're still requesting this kind of aid?

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** They are still requesting this aid. Our nongovernmental partners, more importantly, are also requesting the aid to go in in commodities. So we are working with the authorities, with our nongovernmental partners, with the international aid organizations to try to move aid to those most in need. Communications is difficult, so it's important that all of us try to get the aid where it is needed the most. And I would anticipate that in the days to come that we will continue to try to focus on those who are really urgently in need of the help.

**QUESTION:** What about additional flights? I mean, is there anything specific you can tell us about?

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** We will have some additional flights. We do not yet know the number. We are trying to focus it on what are the supplies that are needed most that our nongovernmental partners are saying to us are the most in need, and then what do we have ready to go. We also have some foodstuffs coming out of our Djibouti warehouse and cooking oil and others. So we will try to meet the needs that our NGO and United Nations and other partners see on the ground as being needed.

**QUESTION:** In your statement -- I may be a little confused or I may have misheard you -- in your statement, I thought you said you're going to urge the Burmese Government to continue issuing visas. How many visas have they issued to Americans to come in?

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** They have not yet issued any visas to our DART team, which is our first and foremost team that we would like to see visas issued to. They are issuing visas to the international community and are continuing to. We are hopeful that our DART team will receive visas and that they can go in and help.

As you know, a DART team provides a great deal of expertise. And in times like this, what you want are experts in sanitation, in water, in logistics, in lift, which is why the military can be such an enormously productive partner for us. So if the military, the nongovernmental organizations, and the aid organizations work together it is the strongest partnership.

**QUESTION:** What sort of capability do you see that the Burmese military has to distribute some of these supplies itself, even with the best of intentions, like number of helicopters or boats?

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** Well, we are reading the same reports that you are reading, with the number of helicopters. They -- when we were at the Rangoon airport, the helicopters were coming in, they were loading our supplies, and they were taking off. So there appear to be lift capacity. There were also several trucks at the airport. And we were not on the water to see boats. But their comments to us were that they could use help in delivering assistance by water, and since we were with Admiral Keating and we were talking about the capacity that we had with the *Essex* and the military assets at hand, we discussed could they be useful and would they be useful in the coastal regions that are so difficult to get to by land.

**QUESTION:** And they said?

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** They would like assistance. So what we're trying to do is to move on next steps, to do it thoughtfully, to do it in a practical and business-like and hard-headed way so that we are being both humanitarians, but we are being thoughtful about how we work in all of our international communities. So we're looking to next steps. We're taking this just one flight, one day, one piece of assistance at a time.

**QUESTION:** Was that number correct, that they only have five helicopters? I mean, is that your understanding?

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** Well, I've also seen that number and I've seen six and I've seen seven, so somewhere in that range. It's not enough. We in the international community know that this is a time of great need and that you need every asset at hand. It is a time when you need the international community.

I mean, what we saw in the tsunami was an international community that brought to bear all of its assets in a number of countries and that was effective. So what we are working toward in Burma is that this entire international community is able to work with its full assets at hand, and if so, I think we can affect the lives of thousands and thousands of people. So right now, all of our assistance is just a small amount compared to the need. And we just have to focus as a community on how we can get more assistance in and how we can deliver it to the people most in need.

**QUESTION:** If I could --

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** And get accountability for it.

**QUESTION:** A second follow-up. There is some talk of reaching out to oil companies that may have equipment inside the country. Has that gone anywhere? Who have you reached out to? What can you tell us about that?

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** There are a number of private companies who have spoken up, who are interested, companies that are, from all nations, who are trying to help with the relief efforts. And so all of us are trying to coordinate with them. But this undertaking of coordination is difficult when you do not yet have your DART team in and your coordinators, who are right now in Bangkok. But we will all continue to try to work.

Many of our NGO partners have very strong offices in Burma, and they are working very strongly but they are stretched thin. So their assets need to be increased, because this is an enormous challenge. This would be difficult for any country. This is a very large challenge.

**QUESTION:** Four questions on China. The first one, I wonder if -- when \$500,000 will be delivered? And if there's any American NGOs rescue team as been on the ground to participate in -- with the effort? And secondly, it was reported by Reuters that United States satellite has collected the geology information around the epicenter area. So I wonder if the United States likes to share the information with Chinese authorities. Thank you.

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** We would like to help in whatever ways the Chinese authorities would like our help. At the moment, they are saying that they do not need search and rescue teams, but they are directing us toward cash donations so that relief and recovery efforts can go on locally. So we are trying to focus on that and to place our assistance as it is needed. But we are at the ready to send in any experts or assistance from any agency or any entity that can help, because we know this is a time of great challenge.

**QUESTION:** You said at the beginning that you were aggressively trying to convince the junta about what is at stake and I'm wondering on this a couple things. One, can you compare at all -- here you have two countries that are regularly singled out by the United States as being authoritarian and repressive, and yet one country seems to have gotten it and the other one doesn't, at least that's what I infer from your -- you seem to be willing -- you seem to have no doubt about the Chinese -- when the Chinese say that we don't need these rescue teams. But you do have doubts about the Burmese when they say that they don't need -- when they don't -- when they say they don't need a DART team. What's the difference in the response of these two countries?

And then the second one is to the Ambassador. What, if anything, have Burma's ASEAN fellows done in terms of getting -- making them aware of the problem, the significant problem that they face?

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** Well, let me start with the first question and turn to the Ambassador for the second. On the first question, we have nongovernmental and United Nations partners who are working in most regions in Burma as well as in many parts of China. We also have many corporations that are working in China. And so we receive a lot of information and we also have been watching the response by the authorities. And I think the Chinese authorities have been quick to respond. They have capacity and they have been very transparent and thoughtful and professional about their approach.

What we are hearing in Burma is that there just is not that capacity. Our nongovernmental partners just do not see that. They see that there is enormous needs for the logistical, the availability, the access and the accountability of assistance to the people. And it is a -- an enormous number of people now that have been displaced, so that we are somewhere between one million and two million people in Burma that have been displaced, which means they are away from their livelihoods and the very basic things like water and food are at stake, which is why we are focusing on the humanitarian aspects.

**MR. CASEY:** Why don't we -- do you want Scot to --

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** I do. Thank you. Scot.

**MR. CASEY:** -- second half of the answer.

**AMBASSADOR MARCIEL:** On ASEAN, I think there are two pieces of this. A number of the ASEAN countries have offered assistance directly. I don't have a complete catalogue of it, but I know several of them have offered assistance. I think a few have actually brought flights in. We heard today that the Burmese authorities had granted permission for foreign experts to come in from neighboring countries, including China, India, Bangladesh and Thailand, I think. So I think some of the ASEANs will be trying to take advantage of that opportunity.

Secondly, I think nearly all the ASEANs have been trying over the – since this disaster to use their contacts with the Burmese authorities to convince them to allow greater international access. I think they share the same concerns we have, that the United Nations has voiced, that, frankly, the regime has been too slow to allow access. And so the Thai Prime Minister was just up there, either today or yesterday. I've lost track of my days. And others in ASEAN have reached out and tried to convince the authorities in Burma to be more open.

**MR. CASEY:** Susan, go ahead.

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** As you can see from all of this, we are just not where we want to be yet, but we are working mightily toward it.

**QUESTION:** Could I just ask how much food aid you're planning for North Korea?

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** That hasn't been decided yet. We are discussing it. We are concerned about the reports of food insecurity in Korea. As you know, this is a time when we are concerned about food insecurity in a lot of countries in the world, and North Korea is certainly one of them.

**QUESTION:** What's the hold-up on announcing the decision?

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** Well, it's – many factors are involved in this and I think Tom Casey and others addressed this in earlier conferences. But when we can just put together the package correctly as to what there is -- availability, access, monitoring -- all of those aspects that we would like to see in our humanitarian assistance programs, then it'll be ready to go and we'll be ready to announce.

**MR. CASEY:** I think one or two last ones. David, go ahead.

**QUESTION:** What do you think is motivating -- what's the thought process among the very few people who run the country of Burma? Are they afraid of being shown up by some big tsunami-style rescue that would show them incapable of running their own government? What do you think is on their minds?

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** I could not tell that from our trip. I do not know. It is a message, though, that we are trying to get through as the international community. That in an international disaster, all of us come to help and it is a desire to help people who are in need. And that is the message we are trying to get across.

**MR. CASEY:** Lach. This is the last one.

**QUESTION:** Do you agree with the Burmese authorities where the aid is needed most? You said it's very important to get the aid to where it's needed most? Do you agree on the areas and what people needed, or are there political barriers to that?

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** We agree on the region. I do not think that our communications as yet are fine enough to agree on particular villages. But we are hearing from our NGO partners, the villages that they would like it sent to. And I think that in the days to come -- I mean, this is the third day after we've begun the commodity flights. It's not too long after we've begun our work through our nongovernmental organization partners and the UN partners. I think in the days to come, we will get a better sense for that, if we are targeting the right areas. But there is so much need that every – this little bit of assistance that we are getting in can be used everywhere.

**MR. CASEY:** Thank you.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**ADMINISTRATOR FORE:** And thank you, everyone.

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