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Mercy Corps' Top European Official Heads to Myanmar

Portland, OR - The global relief and development agency Mercy Corps is sending its top European official to Myanmar, and hopes to have several other members of an emergency-response team in country in the coming week. Mervyn Lee, executive director of Mercy Corps Europe, is expected to arrive early next week in Myanmar.

Once on the ground, Mercy Corps staff will work with partner agencies to help assess needs and explore opportunities to ease suffering in the aftermath of Cyclone Nargis. Mercy Corps continues to work toward a partnership with a global humanitarian agency already on the ground in Myanmar.

"I will be traveling to Myanmar to assess how Mercy Corps can best contribute to recovery and rebuilding efforts," said Mervyn Lee. "Obviously, the humanitarian needs are enormous with basics like food, water and fuel in desperately short supply. We need to get help to people on the ground as soon as possible."

Mercy Corps will explore ways to provide clean water and reduce disease risks through improved sanitation. The agency will also consider Cash-for-Work programs that pay residents to clear debris, repair infrastructure and fill other immediate needs, similar to programs Mercy Corps successfully ran in countries affected by the 2004 tsunami.

Myanmar's government has reported 23,000 deaths, and a U.S. official in Myanmar's capital said Wednesday that there could be more than 100,000 deaths. United Nations officials say several hundred thousand people are without shelter or drinking water and are at risk of disease.

Myanmar's government has accepted some outside help but humanitarian access remains a challenge. Mercy Corps is not registered to work in Myanmar, but has worked with organizations on the ground there in the past year.

Cyclone Nargis swept across Myanmar on May 2 and 3, uprooting trees and flattening buildings with 120-mile-per-hour winds and leaving huge casualties in its wake. The powerful cyclone smashed into the low-lying Irrawaddy delta, unleashing a storm surge as high as 12 feet, according to Reuters. It was the biggest cyclone to hit Asia since 1991.

HOW TO HELP:

Mercy Corps

Myanmar Cyclone Fund

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Mercy Corps works amid disasters, conflicts, chronic poverty and instability to unleash the potential of people who can win against nearly impossible odds. Since 1979, Mercy Corps has provided \$1.5 billion in assistance to people in 106 nations. Supported by headquarters offices in North America and Europe, the agency's unified global programs employ 3,500 staff worldwide and reach nearly 16.4 million people in more than 35 countries.