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LWF DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT SUSPENDED ACTIVITIES' IMPACT ON COMMUNITIES IN MYANMAR

Safety and Protection at Stake for 140,000 IDPs in Rakhine State

YANGON, Myanmar/GENEVA, 3 April 2014 – The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) is deeply concerned about the safety and security of the communities it serves as well as staff persons throughout Rakhine State, western Myanmar, after it temporarily suspended its activities following an outbreak of violence against humanitarian agencies.

Mobs targeting international organizations in Sittwe (Rakhine State capital) on 26 and 27 March attacked the premises of 14 organizations including LWF. They ransacked the offices, warehouses and residences, and destroyed equipment, furniture and documents.

The LWF Myanmar program has since evacuated both its national and international staff from Sittwe to Yangon. All the employees are safe. However the temporary suspension of essential operations in and around Sittwe has critically impacted the lives of the vulnerable people.

“This mob violence is linked to long standing, deep seated and complicated communal tensions. We therefore remain very much concerned about the safety and security of our staff members as well as the IDP’s access to humanitarian services.” says Mr David Mueller, LWF regional representative in Myanmar.

Mueller says the LWF is committed to return to its work in camp coordination and management, education, fire safety and psychosocial support to 18,000 IDPs in four Muslim camps and another 4,000 in two Rakhine camps in Sittwe. “We will return as soon as the safety and security of the aid workers is restored,” he adds, noting that the government has enacted a 6 pm to 6 am curfew in the township and has established an investigation commission.

Fire Volunteers' Training

Although 154 fire safety volunteers (148 male and 6 female) were trained last year, twice as many are needed to ensure realistic preparedness and response capabilities in the current dry and windy season. Further training has been disrupted by the suspension as have the regular awareness and orientation programs in both urban and rural camps, covering all the IDP camps throughout Sittwe township.

Education

The suspension also affects the education of over 7,200 children. The early childhood development program for 1,500 three to five-year-olds will be delayed. Similarly 3,000 primary school children, aged six to ten, will miss important exams that would allow them to mainstream into the Department of Education system, and an additional 2,000 will lose the chance to start their primary education.

Non-formal education for 700 students aged 11 to 17, who have never attended school or dropped out early, will also be delayed. The construction of additional learning facilities that were schedule to begin in April has also been disrupted.

Psychosocial Support for Vulnerable Groups

Putting activities on hold will have significant impact on the already inadequately served protection sector. This includes protection and psychosocial support to over 1,900 people comprised of marginalized groups of women and girls, elderly, people with disabilities, single parents and child-headed households, as well as unaccompanied minors among IDPs in the camps.

Camp Coordination and Management

The monitoring of basic services has been disrupted. This means water, sanitation and health (WASH) and other services are severely impacted due to lack of access to information. There is a risk of insufficient food supply, as the latest distribution will last until the third week of April.

Mueller underlines that the "LWF will monitor all sectors in the camps and keep in close contact with the cluster and sector leaders and members to continually try our best to get services flowing as soon as possible."

The LWF Department for World Service started in Myanmar in 2008, and entered Rakhine state in 2012. The country program works with the government to support vulnerable communities with initiatives to improve food security, livelihoods, WASH, and disaster risk reduction through rights-based empowerment.

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