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Adventists in Myanmar continue relief work as flood devastation worsens

August 17, 2015 | Myanmar | Myo Chan and Teresa Costello

As monsoon rains continue in flood-devastated Myanmar, Adventists throughout the country are responding to the overwhelming needs. Current national news reports indicate the death toll has passed 100 and almost one million people have been affected, a number of whom were already displaced before the flooding.

The Myanmar Union Mission (MYUM) has organized the Central Emergency Disaster Response Committee (CEDRC) to implement Adventist relief work through various small groups.
Last week they assisted 110 families in upper Myanmar and this week relief teams are in the areas surrounding Yangon and in the hard-hit Ayeyarwaddy region.

Adventist schools, churches and individual members are also contributing through fundraising, relief supply donations and on-site relief efforts.

Yangon Adventist Seminary (YAS) students collected $400 USD in funds for students at their sister institution, Upper Myanmar Adventist Seminary, located in Kalaymo which is in one of the regions declared under a state of emergency. Local churches across Myanmar have donated funds, food items, clothing and ready-to-eat meals. An Adventist restauranteur donated food boxes for all relief teams so they could continue their work in disaster areas.

Notably, an Adventist World Radio team partnered with YAS teachers and students. They delivered relief supplies and provide support to an isolated village 170 miles from the nation’s capital of Yangon on August 13.

Water continues to cover the village’s roads, houses, schools and jetty. Of the 109 families there, more than 500 people have been affected. The flood destroyed their homes as well as the rice paddy fields which serve as their source of livelihood. According to the villagers, the Adventist group was the first to arrive with assistance.

Meanwhile, on the same day in southern Mynamar, Ayeyarwaddy Mission President Khin Maung Latt, Executive Secretary A One Thein and other relief team members also distributed food items. As part of a MYUM’s overall strategic plan to assist both community and church members, the AM team focused that day’s efforts on a village where more than 70 members live.

With the effects of the flood devastation challenging relief efforts, groups such as the Adventist church and ADRA have enormous opportunities to assist as many survivors as they can. While it may seem that the response is limited in comparison to the overwhelming needs, Adventist church leaders in Myanmar believe that Adventists there can still make a powerful impact in survivors’ lives through an organized, compassionate response.

Myanmar is one of the 14 countries within the Southern Asia-Pacific Division. With Buddhism as the main religion, it is home to 230 Adventist churches and over 28,000 Adventists.

For current news about ADRA Myanmar’s activities, please go to https://www.facebook.com/AdventistDevelopmentAndReliefAgencyMyanmar. Donations can be given through ADRA International at www.adra.org.

ADRA Provides Education to Displaced Iraqis in Kurdistan
August 18, 2015 | Kurdistan, Iraq | ADRA Staff

Violence in Iraq has displaced at least 3 million people, 50 percent of which have fled to the Kurdish-controlled governorates in the north of Iraq where the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) is working.

For more than six months, ADRA has been operating in Baharka Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camp providing services to families who have fled fighting in Iraq.

ADRA’s programs focus on informal education, protection, and restoring livelihoods for the most vulnerable families in the camp.

Through ADRA’s programs, volunteer teachers are providing informal education to small children with materials from UNICEF and while following guiding principles set by the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq.

“During the school holidays and the fasting month, ADRA is the only nongovernmental organization focusing on providing informal education to children ages 4-5 in the Baharka IDP Camp at this time,” said Leyn Gantare, ADRA country director in Kurdistan.

The agency is also providing one nutritious meal to each child in attendance and organizing recreational activities to 400 children. Children’s recreational activities include sporting events, drawing competitions, music and games, etc.

“These kinds of activities allow children to express themselves and stay socially connected with other children,” said Gantare. “Our activities are especially targeting girls and children with disabilities.”

ADRA partner UNICEF is providing tents for education and child-friendly spaces that will allow children to be occupied in a constructive and safe way.

To increase the resilience of the displaced population, ADRA is offering small grants that will enable families to start their own small businesses. ADRA community mobilizers and social counselors are following-up regularly with the business owners as well as providing training in cash and business management. The agency has been providing Kurdish lessons as well to help adults and children integrate with the local communities.

ADRA programs in Kurdistan also include awareness campaigns to both displaced Iraqis and the host Kurdish community about hygiene, the dangers of child marriage, children’s education, good community relations and cooperation, and inclusion of persons with disabilities among other things.

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency International is the humanitarian arm of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Its work empowers communities and changes lives around the globe by providing sustainable community development and disaster relief. For more information, visit ADRA.org.
In Colombia, first Adventist Church organized on a public university campus

August 17, 2015 | Medellin, Antioquia, Colombia | Shirley Rueda/IAD Staff

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North Colombia recently celebrated a newly organized church on the campus of a public university in the State of Antioquia, in North Colombia.

Church administrators and leaders boasted about the importance of organizing the first church on a public campus in the territory and the country, during a special ceremony on Aug. 8, 2015.

"This ceremony means so much because it is to celebrate the establishment of an Adventist Church on the University of Antioquia, a prestigious and important institution in Colombia," said Pastor Gonzalo Cardona, president of the southwest region in Colombia.

The new church group grew thanks to the vision of two students at the University of Antioquia, or UdeA, who decided to form a group called "Friends of Jesus" at the entrance of the university's museum building in 2010. There they met to seek out other Adventists enrolled in the university every Friday evening at sunset for vespers worship. The group began to grow and in 2012 it had 18 members. Today the university church has 27 members including currently enrolled students and former students.

Pastor Johnathan Gallego, who is the youth pastor for the district, said it is so unique and special to have a church meeting every week in a public university.

"This had never been seen before, in a state that claims to be secular, but of great Catholic influence, allowing us to have a congregation of young people who can preach to other young people," said Gallego. "It’s wonderful to have a beacon of light in a place where so much thought, even atheism and other beliefs are prevalent, and provide this university the hope of Jesus Christ through the Adventist message."

What makes this church so special, besides being within the UdeA, is its missionary spirit and evangelistic strategies to reach an audience that has an advanced intellectual level, but also has common needs, added Gallego.

Some of the evangelistic plans include holding a symposium on creationism with Adventist speakers, said Pastor Gustavo Esteban, pastor of the university church. "We will continue with our music ministry where we visit students who have problems, pray with them, sing to encourage them and invite them to be part of our church."
The university church has also held weeks of evangelism as well as the “We Pray for You” initiative where church members take their guitars to different parts of the campus to sing, pray, and distribute literature. “They do all of this because they firmly believe that the university is the center spot and the principal objective is to make the university a university for God,” added Esteban.

For Jochebed Bohorquez, health administration student at UdeA, seeing the church organized on campus means more opportunities to reach more people. “As young people, we must continue being a good example because God has prepared great things for the university and the church.”

The Universidad de Antioquia is a public university that allows its students to perform various kinds of activities freely, said David Perez, an astronomy student, “so from the start of the small group, Adventist young people have met freely and the university has been very accommodating when the group needs a room or a more comfortable place for meetings.

Plans are to build a church, leaders said. In the meantime, students meet outdoors on campus.

Founded in 1803, the Universidad de Antioquia is the leading academic institution in the State of Antioquia and has more than 36,000 students. This year, the Ministry of Education placed it at No. 6 among the top 20 universities in Colombia.

To view pictures of the special ceremony, click here: flic.kr/s/aHskhpjmd7