

# Burma blocked aid supplies - report

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THE UNITED Nations Security Council should refer Burma (Myanmar) to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for the manner in which it blocked humanitarian relief efforts during last year's cyclone in the country, according to an independent inquiry into the episode.

A report, framed around extensive interviews with relief workers and survivors, says the government's "systematic obstruction" of relief aid, penalisation of minority ethnic groups and use of forced labour in reconstruction could constitute crimes against humanity.

The report, published today by a group of leading international healthcare experts, says the Burmese government had been more concerned about forcing through a referendum on an authoritarian new constitution on May 10th last year rather than dealing with Cyclone Nargis, which struck eight days earlier, killing 140,000 and affecting 3.4 million people.

"The data reveal systematic obstruction of relief aid, wilful acts of theft and sale of relief supplies, forced relocation, and the use of forced labour for reconstruction projects, including forced child labour," the report states.

"The slow distribution of aid, the push to hold the referendum vote, and the early refusal to accept foreign assistance are evidence of the junta's primary concern for regime survival and political control over the well-being of the Burmese people."

The report, *After the Storm: Voices from the Delta*, is jointly-authored by the US-based Centre for Public Health and Human Rights at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, and Emergency Assistance Team (EAT), an umbrella group of health care workers which helped an estimated 180,000 survivors without the approval of the Burmese government. Among the 90 relief workers and survivors interviewed was a physician who said he had to flee the country when the military started asking questions about his connections with external relief agencies. Another relief worker said the government refused to give aid to Christian minorities "because they know they may be helped by Christian organisations". The report says there is evidence of "multiple human rights violations and the abrogation of international humanitarian relief norms and international legal frameworks for disaster relief".

These could constitute crimes against humanity, it says.

Burma Action Ireland said European members of the UN Security Council should request an immediate ICC investigation.

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