



MYANMAR

ICRC RESPONSE TO COVID-19

MARCH TO MAY 2020

Countries around the world are currently facing unprecedented challenges in their efforts to prevent and mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Myanmar, and many other countries where the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is present, the threat of COVID-19 is particularly acute for communities living in areas affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence, as well as for some particularly vulnerable groups such as internally displaced persons, people deprived of freedom, or migrants.



ICRC

In support of the Myanmar Government's actions to prevent and mitigate the risks associated to COVID-19, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), alongside the Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) and its other partners from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, is striving to ensure that people affected by armed conflict and other situations of violence are not left behind, and they receive the assistance and protection to which they are entitled in line with International Humanitarian Law.

Between March and Mid-June 2020, Myanmar's Ministry of Health and Sports has confirmed less than 300 positive COVID-19 cases. Despite the low-infection rate in the country, ICRC remains concerned for tens of thousands of families affected by armed conflict and violence, including displaced people living in temporary shelters and IDP sites. The situation is particularly worrying in Rakhine State where hostilities are ongoing, but also in northeastern areas of the country, where primary public health services are limited for resident communities and returning migrants. The ICRC also considers that special attention is required for prison populations who face a higher risk of contamination when facilities are overcrowded, have poor hygiene, or lack ventilation.

In response to these concerns, across the country the MRCS, as an auxiliary to the public authorities, is providing valuable support to the national COVID-19 response through its network of staff and volunteers activated in 277 townships. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) - with the mandate to scale up for disasters and pandemics - is supporting MRCS through the international mobilisation of financial, technical and logistics resources.

For the ICRC, ongoing programmes have been swiftly adapted to the new realities of the virus in order to ensure the continuity of life-saving activities such as food distributions, or the evacuations of weapon-wounded civilians in areas affected by conflict. At the same time, in coordination with the relevant authorities and the MRCS, the ICRC rapidly developed a wide range of COVID-19-prevention activities in the areas of healthcare, water and habitat, or protection. For example, 370 handwashing stations were installed, 51,000 COVID-19 protective equipment and sanitation items were provided to health facilities of the Ministry of Health and Sports, and 65,000 bars of soap were distributed in IDP camps, quarantine centres and township hospitals in Kachin, Rakhine and Shan States.

In coordination with relevant Union and State level authorities, the ICRC engaged non-state armed groups,

ethnic health organizations, religious leaders and local media to provide assistance and convey COVID-19 prevention messages to communities. At the same time, the ICRC supported the Prison Authorities for prevention and infection control in detention facilities, as well as the organization of the safe return home of 2,500 detainees released following the annual presidential pardon.

The ICRC is working to improve living conditions in existing and new IDP sites by improving basic shelter, access to safe water, and building basic latrines for better hygiene. Wherever possible, local authorities are supported to prepare and stock quarantine and isolation facilities with protective materials, infection prevention control and training for health staff.

Although all the consequences of the current COVID-19 crisis still remain difficult to assess or to predict, it is already foreseen that COVID-19 will not only affect public health services, but it will also impact the lives and livelihoods of many people in Myanmar, especially in areas already affected by situations of protracted conflict, where the humanitarian situation is already often precarious.

In an effort to anticipate the needs of communities and identify areas for future support, the ICRC conducted a recent survey with nearly 500 people in Kachin, Rakhine and Shan states. Results indicate there is an extremely high socio-economic impact of COVID-19 for families living in conflict and violence affected areas. The ICRC plans to adjust its economic security programmes to contribute to addressing these gaps in the coming months, whether through cash programming or covering basic humanitarian needs, so that those who are most affected and exposed to the impacts of COVID-19 are less vulnerable.

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“In the new context of COVID-19, it remains a top priority for the ICRC to continue protecting and assisting people affected by armed conflict and violence while reminding all parties of their obligation, under International Humanitarian Law, to ensure access to healthcare to all communities,” explains Stephan Sakalian, Resident Representative for the ICRC in Myanmar. “We also need to join the efforts of the authorities, Myanmar Red Cross Society, civil society and the whole humanitarian and development community to prevent and mitigate the risks associated to COVID-19 in Myanmar. It is the responsibility of everyone to act when faced with such a global and far-reaching crisis”.

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Cover Image: ICRC

Through our Safe Return Home programme, ICRC helped 2,500 newly released detainees with financial support and COVID-19 prevention information – allowing them a safe, dignified passage home following the annual presidential pardon.



HEALTH RESPONSE



239 staff from the Ministry of Health and Sports and **20** community health workers or auxiliary midwives trained on infection prevention control and COVID-19 in Kachin, Rakhine and Shan States



90 staff from the Ministry of Health and Sports and **30** community health volunteers financially supported to conduct COVID-19 screenings for migrants returning from China at **3** border gates in Shan State and **5** border gates in Kachin State



51,000 COVID-19 protective and sanitation items (face shields, surgical masks, protective goggles, latex gloves, non-contact thermometers, hand gel disinfectant, soaps, etc.) supplied to **10** hospitals and civil society organizations in Kachin, Rakhine and Shan States



49,000 COVID-19 pamphlets and **10** billboards with prevention information distributed in communities, as well as **20** tents donated to health facilities in Kachin, Rakhine and Shan States



IMPROVING ACCESS TO WATER, SANITATION & HYGIENE



370 handwashing stations installed in IDP camps, health facilities, quarantine centres, and township hospitals in Kachin, Rakhine, and Shan States



10 tents donated to the Department of Disaster Management for isolation of suspected COVID-19 cases in Lashio (Shan State)



22 emergency latrines constructed with the Myanmar Red Cross Society for quarantine centres hosting returning migrants in Lashio (Shan State)



65,000 bars of soap to IDP camps and state health authorities for distribution at IDP camps and hospitals in Kachin, Rakhine and Shan States



230 quarantine centres run by the township, district and state authorities supported with COVID-19 prevention items including soap and protective equipment in Myitkyina and Lashio (Kachin and Shan States)



INFECTION-CONTROL IN DETENTION AND QUARANTINE FACILITIES



872 released detainees supported with food, blankets, hygiene kits, and other essentials in **16** quarantine sites in Rakhine State, including **31** cases of family reunification



24 solar kits donated to **12** health facilities and quarantine centres run by the Ministry of Health and Sports in northern areas of Rakhine State



40,000 bars of soap donated to Insein, Mandalay and Monhyin prisons



1,170 people reached through technical and material upgrades of **5** quarantine centres run by township, district and state authorities in Myitkyina, Kachin States



Delivery of **32,000** litres of chlorine solution, **92** sprayers and **90** sets of personal protective equipment for the disinfection of **6** prisons (Insein, Mandalay, Lashio, Myitkyina, Sittwe, Maungdaw) for approximately **30,000** detainees



Standard Operating Procedures for the Prevention and Control COVID-19 in places of detention shared with the Prisons Department and technical advice to the prison authorities for management of detainees in context of COVID-19



1,000 COVID-19 posters from the Ministry of Health and Sports delivered to the Prisons Department for distribution in prisons



Materials for **45,000** cloth facemasks donated to prisons in Insein, Mandalay, Sittwe and Lashio



PARTNERING WITH MYANMAR RED CROSS SOCIETY



6,000 Red Cross identification aprons produced for the Myanmar Red Cross Society to be used with personal COVID-19 protective equipment and reduce potential contamination of uniforms



5,000 Red Cross volunteers equipped with waistcoats and protective helmets



7 National Red Cross Societies including American, Danish, Finnish, German, Norwegian, Swedish, Turkish Red Cross together, alongside with the International Federation of the Red Cross and with ICRC mobilized to support the Myanmar Red Cross Society's COVID-19 response



3,600 Myanmar Red Cross staff and volunteers provided with COVID-19 insurance coverage and trained on the use of COVID-19 personal protective equipment and masks



3 States (Kachin, Rakhine and Shan States) where Myanmar Red Cross Society local branches were supported with face shields, surgical masks, protective goggles, latex gloves, non-contact thermometers, hand-gel disinfectant to protect their staff and volunteers working in community prevention, quarantine centers or involved in COVID-19 screening.



RAISING AWARENESS ON COVID-19



20,000 Facebook users reached through #InfoAsAid digital messaging focusing on hygiene promotion and COVID-19 prevention



1,500 people engaging with ICRC via Facebook to obtain more information or share COVID-19 prevention messaging



60,000 COVID-19 prevention information posters approved by the Ministry of Health and Sports shared with communities in Kachin, Rakhine and Shan States



2,500 prisoners across Myanmar supported by the "Safe Return Home" programme, including COVID-19 prevention information, after release from detention under the annual presidential pardon



Recommendations on risk and prevention measures related to law enforcement operations were shared with Myanmar Police Force



Advocacy note on "IHL and COVID-19" shared with civilian and military authorities, ethnic armed organizations and other stakeholders



ICRC Guidelines on Dead Body Management in context of COVID-19 prepared for armed and security forces of Myanmar



ONGOING ACTIVITIES WITH NEW COVID-19 PROTOCOLS



207 weapon-wounded civilians requiring urgent treatment attended by the ICRC-supported emergency referral system in Kachin, Rakhine and Shan States



Around **80,000** people affected by the 2017 conflict as well as **70,000** IDPs affected by recent clashes between the Myanmar Military and the Arakan Army helped with food assistance and essential relief items in Rakhine State



10,000 families living in IDP camps in Rakhine State received fuel sticks for cooking



950 farmers supported with certified seeds for rice-paddy production in Rakhine State in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture



6,000 people reached through 10 awareness sessions on landmines and unexploded ordnance in Rakhine State

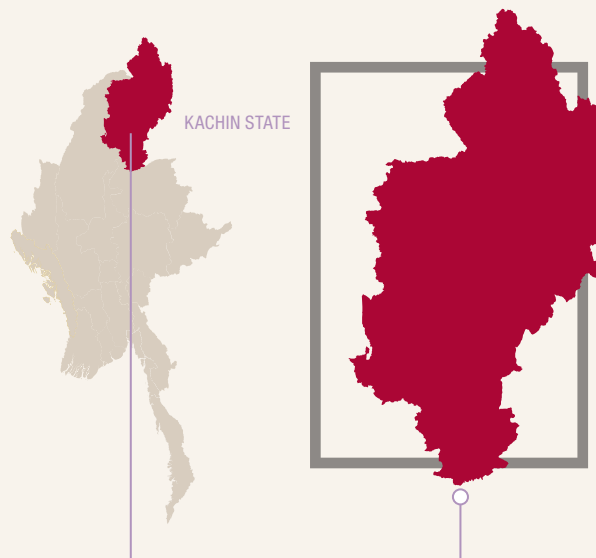


1,700 information pamphlets on landmines and unexploded ordnance shared with at-risk communities in Rakhine State

SNAPSHOT OF ICRC ACTIVITIES IN MYANMAR

KACHIN STATE

In Kachin, ICRC has focused on supporting the health authorities to prepare a response to COVID-19, including donations of protective equipment, technical advice and capacity building for preparedness in health facilities, and support for community health workers. ICRC has worked closely to support MRCS through capacity building and donations of materials in its work in communities, conducting awareness raising and supporting authorities to prevent the spread of the disease. In addition, ICRC has supported government-run quarantine facilities used for preventative isolation of migrants returning from other countries, as well as those travelling from other parts of the country. ICRC has also worked closely with the Department of Disaster Management to support the needs of IDPs as well as with prison authorities to help prevent the spread of the virus in places of detention.



Donations of liquid soap were given to the state health department for distribution to quarantine centers across Kachin.



Basic hygiene kits and COVID-19 prevention information was provided for people in quarantine centres and border gates along with the Myanmar Red Cross Society.



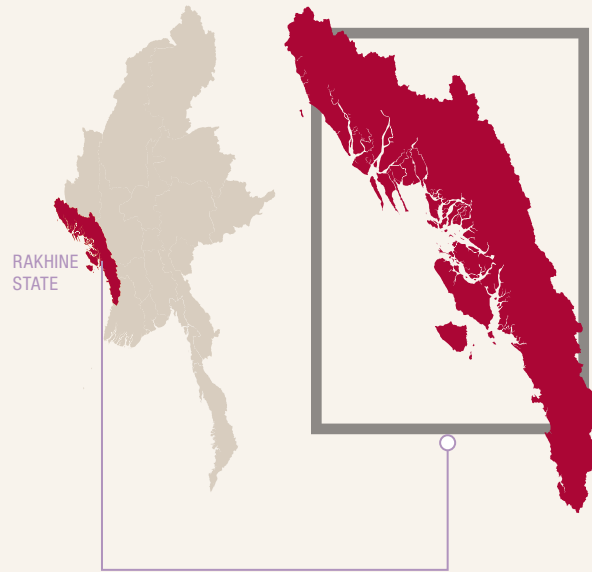
Working with the Ministry of Health and Sports, quarantine areas were renovated for preventative isolation in Myitkyina.



People in quarantine centres were provided with phone cards, so they could maintain contact with their families.

RAKHINE STATE

Across Rakhine State, in cooperation with the Myanmar Red Cross Society, the ICRC is working with all communities, including internally displaced persons (IDPs) or people deprived of freedom, to alleviate the suffering caused by armed conflict and violence. In parallel with its ongoing emergency response, the ICRC has developed, since April 2020, a wide range of COVID-19 responses in nine townships (Buthidaung, Kyauktaw, Maungdaw, Minbya, Mrauk-U, Myebon, Pauktaw, Rathedaung and Sittwe) including in IDP sites, village tracks and health facilities (township hospitals, station hospitals, and rural health centres). These activities were formalized in mid-May 2020 with the Union Government of Myanmar in an *ICRC Action Plan to support the Government of Myanmar's efforts to prevent a potential COVID-19 outbreak in Rakhine state*. In this framework, measures have been put in place to respond to the unique challenges of COVID-19, such as supplying Sittwe and Buthidaung prisons with protective personal equipment, installing handwashing stations in IDP camps and improving infection control in health facilities and quarantine sites. Thousands of people have been reached with COVID-19 related safety messaging and assistance over the past three months.



Protective equipment, including face masks and gloves, as well as trainings on the prevention of COVID-19 were delivered to prison staff in Sittwe and Buthidaung.



Hundreds of handwashing stations have been installed at IDP camps across Rakhine, delivered along with information sessions on prevention of COVID-19.



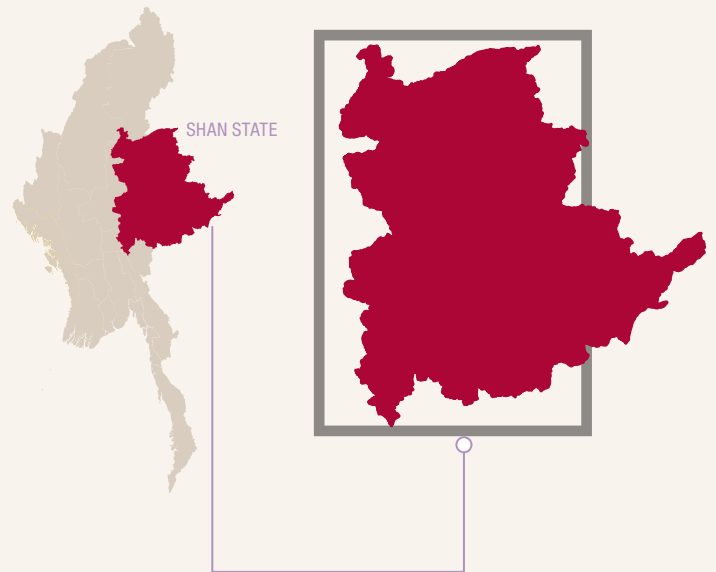
Water filters were distributed across IDP camps so families displaced by the conflict have access to clean, safe water to prevent the spread of COVID-19.



Information sessions on handwashing to prevent the spread of COVID-19 were conducted at IDP camps through Rakhine.

SHAN STATE

In Shan State, in cooperation with the Myanmar Red Cross Society, the ICRC is working to prevent the spread of COVID-19 through a number of initiatives including the provision of personal protective equipment, hand washing basins, awareness and hygiene materials. A special effort has been placed on equipping quarantine centres deployed by the authorities to host returning working migrants, and direct support to the prison authorities and Ministry of Health and Sports.



In Kyaing Tong, essential supplies such for sanitation and hygiene were given to a quarantine centre housing returning migrants.



Construction of temporary latrines were installed at quarantine centres in Lashio to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.



Personal protective equipment and chlorine solution were provided to Lashio Prison authorities to reduce vulnerability to COVID-19 for detainees.



Together with the Myanmar Red Cross Society, materials were provided to support state-run quarantine facilities for returning migrants.



ICRC

In the past three months since the first official case of COVID-19 was declared in Myanmar, 60,000 COVID-19 prevention information posters approved by the Ministry of Health and Sports were shared by the ICRC with communities throughout Kachin, Rakhine and Shan States.

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