

Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association



Discussions from the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association Concerning the False News Reports from Internal and External Dissident Groups

June 2006

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Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association is a voluntary social organization (NGO) that is working to enhance the health, education and living standards of mothers and children in Myanmar.

Out of population of 55 million in Myanmar, more than half are women and children. The Government formed the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association as a voluntary social organization on 30 April 1991 by passing legislation No. 21/90 with the objective of promoting health and well being of mothers and children.

Currently, our membership stands at over 5.4 million. Immediately after the founding of the Association, it gives priority to health activities. Later, in addition to health care activities, educational, economic and social welfare programmes, contacts with organizations in the country and abroad became the primary focus of the Association in order to contribute to economic and social activities for higher living standards. Our members, belong to a hierarchy of branch associations from the grass roots level in rural areas to township, district, state, division and central executive committee levels, are providing assistance to the people. Members of the Central Executive Committee and the Central Council are always aware of the developments in the public as they work among the people.

In *The White Shirts* published by Network for Democracy and Development (NDD) in May 2006, false accusations are made under the headings — Organizational Structure, Recruitment Procedures and Control of Civil Society — to the effect that together with the USDA, Women's Affairs Federation and Maternal and Child Welfare Association are interfering in the activities of other NGOs and trying to gain control over them under the guise of carrying out activities for the public benefit. In reality, recruitment is entirely on a voluntary basis and those who appreciate the Association's belief, aim and mission to serve the people become members.

Our members are both male and female volunteers with varying economic circumstances. They take an interest in social affairs and have a strong motivation to work for others. They wish to provide financial assistance and professional skills they possess and able to devote sufficient time to volunteer work. As the Association was born out of the people, it is impossible that allegations such as the Association bullies the people. In fact the successful activities of the Association for the benefit of the people are due to the people's awareness and support of its services for mothers and children.

Another fabrication is that the Association forces its members to attend mass rallies. In fact, it even limits the number of members in attendance at mass rallies as there are too many who wish to participate. The Association also receives contributions from well-wishers who have witnessed our activities that benefit the people and wish to make a donation according to the Buddhist custom.

As the Association serves the interests of the people, they accept it as their own organization. While it plays a role in helping to prevent the self-serving activities of some organizations in Myanmar and abroad that receive assistance from organizations in foreign countries, it neither interferes nor tries to force itself on the activities of other INGOs.

In its health activities, the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association focuses on community-based health activities. It cooperates with the Ministry of Health especially in the implementation work of health awareness programmes, prevention, control and elimination of infectious diseases and basic health development projects that are being carried out by the MoH.

In 2005, the Association conducted 251,837 health talks, which attracted 14,326,672 participants.

Currently, the world's nations are implementing the United Nations' Millennium Goals. To fulfill the Goals the Association is working for the reduction of under-five mortality rate by two-thirds, and maternal mortality rate by three quarters while combating malaria, tuberculosis, AIDS and other diseases with constant cooperation of the MoH,.

Since 1995-96 the MMCWA has been engaged in the prevention of HIV/AIDS in cooperation with the MoH and UN agencies. It has carried out projects with the support of such UN agencies as UNICEF, UNDP, UNAIDS, NAP, and such organizations as CARE/MDM, and JTF. It is also initiating its own activities with funds from the state, division, district and township branch associations contributed by members and donations from well-wishers. Between 1994 and 2005, the Association carried out projects in life skills training for housewives, awareness raising, advocacy workshop on HIV/AIDS for district leaders, peer education training, home-based care, care, counseling and support, responding to emerging needs of people living with AIDS (PLWHAs). In 2005, 5,639 HIV/AIDS educational activities are carried out, reaching 4,232,840 people.

The allegations against the Government concerning the threat of HIV/AIDS, contained in the NCUB statement are also falsehoods. The Government has formed a hierarchy of National Health Committees, which are carrying out health care activities as a national movement. The project and activities that our Association taking part prove that measures for the prevention, cure and control of HIV/AIDS are being carried out as a national movement from the central level to village grassroots level.

World AIDS Day ceremony held annually on 1 December is one of the activities carried out in partnership with organizations in Myanmar and abroad and it is also part of the national movement under the leadership of the Government.

Allegations by the NCGUB to the effect that Myanmar is extremely backward in education, poorest in terms of fundamental human rights and security for women and children are falsehoods.

The Government is making endeavours to build a modern, developed nation. The Government, the Armed Forces and the People have joined hands and our Association also contributes enthusiastically together with other NGOs such as the USDA, Women's Affairs, the Myanmar Red Cross Society, etc.

In the education sector, our Association has set up pre-primary schools with the aim of supporting the all-round early childhood development, both physically and intellectually. The schools fulfill the needs of children who lack a mother's care and enabling mothers to engage in income-generating activities and businesses as they can entrust their children to safe nurseries.

In addition, we provide assistance such as educational stipends to enable children to complete primary school education. We carry out literacy campaigns for the middle-aged and the elderly in order to achieve a higher literacy rate.

As a result of the efforts made by the Ministry of Education, the literacy rate among the elderly in Myanmar is 94%, the highest in East Asia. School enrollment has also gone up from 65.7% in 1990 to 97% in 2005.

The MMCWA carries out mothers and children care activities in order to ensure safe motherhood and safe childhood starting from pregnancy to birth.

The maternity clinics opened by the MMCWA provide health care services for the reduction of maternal mortality, infant mortality and under-five mortality, which are included in the Millennium Development Goals. The maternity clinics provide access to reproductive health care services, care during pregnancy and safe delivery with professionals, postnatal care, health education, vaccination, birth spacing for the health of the mother and the child, breastfeeding, and the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV/AIDS. In cooperation with the MoH and UNFPA, the MMCWA has carried out projects in reproductive health, behavioural change communication, adolescent reproductive health and provided reproductive health education for young people with a special focus on HIV/AIDS and the prevention of narcotic drugs abuse.

Regarding the nutrition of children, the MMCWA is working to ensure under-five nutrition by conducting a survey of malnourished children, setting up village food banks in villages and townships, opening community nutrition centres, initiating a growth monitoring programme to ensure nutrition of children, carrying out education programmes for mothers on nutritious cooking and demonstration of cooking techniques, conducting training courses, and giving supplements for iodine deficiency, iron-deficiency, vitamin-A deficiency and other conditions caused by malnutrition.

The participation and contributions of the MCCWA in activities implemented by the MoH under the leadership of the Government may be likened to a brick or a grain of sand in a building. As a result of the endeavours made by the Government health status has risen. The under-five mortality declines from 130 per 1000 live births in 1990 to 66.6 in 2005 while under-one mortality has decreased from 98 per 1000 live births in 1998 to 49.7 in 2003. As

an outcome of public health care activities, Myanmar was able to declare the eradication of smallpox, polio and leprosy. Allegations of dissidents within Myanmar and abroad of low health standards is not only false but also suggest a determination to find fault with any and every government programme on their part.

While the MCCWA is making special efforts to provide vocational training, assist in finding jobs and create income-generation opportunities with the aim of raising family incomes and living standards, the EU and the West imposed economic sanctions on our country, resulting in the closure of a number of factories, which greatly affected the working mothers. The Association redoubled its efforts for the benefit of mothers and families and has provided the necessary social support and assistance in the form of small loans, seed money or capital and assisted in finding employment. The allegation that Myanmar is a country where employment opportunities are scarce is simply not true.

As for social welfare activities, the Association provides assistance to those with health problems. It has initiated a programme of treatment for eye disease under which 5,564 cataract patients were operated in 2005 and regained eye sight. Similarly, patients with congenital defects, cleft lips and cleft palates have received operations. It is also engaged in providing care for the elderly as part of its contribution to social welfare work. In 2005, 473,138 elderly persons have received health care and social welfare

In addition, the MMCWA in cooperation with other social organizations (NGOs) obtain access to female inmates of prisons and imprisoned mothers in accordance with rules and regulations, as part of its social support work. It is also carrying out humanitarian activities in partnership with the Government, departments concerned and NGOs.

The MMCWA is also making efforts to promote health, education, economic and social activities for the benefit of mothers, children and families, its contributes on a continuous basis to activities that serve the fundamental interests of the nation. As for the persistent allegations by the ILO that Myanmar continues to use forced labour, such allegations are entirely false as the actual fact is that the Myanmar people including our members are voluntarily contributing labour as a form of charity in order to gain merit in accordance with our customs and cultural traditions.

The Association is working in partnership with various organizations within Myanmar and abroad that have similar aims and visions. Its partners include the UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNAIDS, WHO, IPPF, and GGA (Japan) in the health sector and the Asia Maternal and Child Welfare Association (AMCWA) and 2050 Organization (Japan) in the education sector.

The MMCWA is one of the organizations taking part in national development activities. As our membership has reached 5.4 million out of a total population of 55 million, 10% of the people are our members. With one member in every two households, we have been able to carry out health, education, economic and social welfare activities very effectively for the

people in accordance with the objectives of the Association. The activities of our Association are non-political and are only concerned for the care of mothers, their children and their families. Every member is involved in the four major activities of the Association: health, education, social affairs and economic affairs in order to fulfill the needs of the State and the People. As our Association works for the people's interests and benefit, we enjoy popular support. We also serve as necessary in order to prevent the harmful self-serving activities of some organizations inside Myanmar and abroad, which work only for their own interests rather than those of the people after receiving assistance from foreign organizations. Our members will always stand on the side of the People and the Government as an organization based on volunteer spirit engaged in activities that serve the benefits of the general public without self interest.

The activities and programmes of our Association are achieving success through the participation of the public and the support and guidance of the government, ministries and departments concerned. The cooperation of international organizations and UN agencies, and the participation of local NGO partners such as the Union Solidarity and Development Association, Women's Affairs Federation, the Myanmar Red Cross Society, and the Myanmar Medical Association.

The allegations that Myanmar has low health, education and living standards and that Myanmar constitutes a threat to world peace run counter to the health care, educational welfare, social welfare and economic development activities undertaken as mentioned above. In reality, endeavours to ensure security and peace together with quality of life for the people have had positive impact and achieved progress. The dissident groups inside Myanmar and abroad who harbour malice toward our country together with some quarters have attempted to intervene in Myanmar affairs by requesting the UN Security Council to take measures against Myanmar. They are individuals and organizations that have never served the interest of Myanmar and her people in any way.

The Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association shall continue its welfare work in four major areas of health, education, social affairs and economic affairs of the people, whether or not it receives assistance from outside the country.