Metta Development Foundation’s Response to COVID-19 (23 March 2020)

Coronavirus Disease pandemic is spreading extremely fast around the world, affecting all countries and peoples. The alarming situation has brought the attention of all governments and the WHO has alerted repeatedly on the importance to take preventive radical measures now, before it becomes uncontrollable. Officially, the Ministry of Health and Sports (MoHS) of Myanmar has not yet declared any case in the country: despite the proximity to China makes the Myanmar population very exposed to the contagious disease. Government has acknowledged the pandemic and made a public announcement to avoid any public gathering, and it is preparing a contingency plan on it.

Metta assumes that COVID-19 is already in Myanmar, spreading fast and most probably having soon, a big impact on IDP congested camps, specially of those nearby China border. Metta is extremely worried about the impact that the COVID-19 is having and will have specially to the most vulnerable communities. In order to mitigate and respond to the outbreak in Myanmar, Metta developed an organisational contingency plan on 3\(^\text{rd}\) March 2020; and facilitated a joint position-advocacy paper, together with the Joint Strategy Team (JST) and Kachin Humanitarian Concern Committee (KHCC) on 12\(^{th}\) March 2020. In the most likely scenario, Myanmar’s fragile health care system will not be able to cope with the Coronavirus infected persons and the regular health caseload, (people with regular sickness, urgent attention cases, etc.). In order to confront this situation Metta has developed and it is implementing an action plan in coordination with various CSOs including JST, to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in IDP camps and communities we are working with. This plan is articulated around three axes:

1. **Community and IDPs camps, public mobilization and awareness raising**, in communities where Metta have been working (Kachin, Shan, Kayah, Northern part of Kayin, Delta and Yangon) and IDPs camps and host communities (mainly in Kachin and Northern Shan States). Our initial work focuses more on IDPs since they are the most venerate. Based on Metta’s extensive experience and knowledge working with IDPs camps on public mobilization, Metta is working hand in hand with other communities to share this know-how, and scale up as fast as possible all preventive measures: awareness raising, hygiene support and contingency planning that will include referral system.

2. **Engagement with CSOs, local leaders and faith based leaders** and communities; as they could leverage on the preparedness for the COVID19 outbreak in Myanmar. Metta have good experience working with CSOs platforms and religious leaders. Based on this, Metta is scaling up our engagement with them at National and Subnational levels; sharing our experiences knowledge and tools with CSOs in Kachin State, Humanitarian Strategy Team- Northern Shan State (HST-NSS) as well as with Rakhine CSO’s.

3. **Engagement with Ministry of Health and Sports (MoHS) and relevant stakeholders**: Without public, private, government and CSOs collaboration, National contingency plan may not be effective. CSOs should engage and collaborate proactively with Government’s efforts as well as influencing and advocating more on their national contingency plan and preparedness. Metta is engaging with MoHS at state and township levels in awareness campaigns and in providing official information to the general population. In Non-Government Controlled Areas; CSOs, should cooperate with the respective health authorities, so that all the population in Myanmar regardless of their situation, are protected as much as possible from this pandemic.

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