

Information bulletin



Sri Lanka: Flash Floods

Information bulletin n° 1
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This bulletin is being issued for information only, and reflects the current situation and details available at this time. The Sri Lanka Red Cross Society, with the support of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), has determined that external assistance is not required, and is therefore not seeking funding or other assistance from donors at this time.

[<click here to view the map of the affected area, or here for detailed contact information>](#)



Flooding in Colombo district has affected over 140,000 people.
Photo: local news agency

The Situation

Pre-monsoon rains caused by a depression in the lower atmosphere have brought on heavy rain accompanied by strong wind, lightning and thunder across western, central and southern provinces of the island in the past few days. The Bay of Bengal depression which triggered the gale-force winds blowing over Sri Lanka intensified into a cyclonic storm known as 'Laila' and as a result Kalutara, Gampaha, Colombo, Rathnapura, Kurunegala, Galle, Puttalam, and Matara districts were flooded. The Sri Lankan meteorology department reports that the country has experienced 283 mm of rain in Galle, 177 mm in Ratmalana, 133.1 mm in Colombo and 278.6 mm in Kalutara.

The national disaster management centre on 21 May 2010 reported that 26 people were killed while 14,634 people were forced to leave their homes due to the floods. More than 500,000 people have been affected by continuous rains over the past few days. Several passengers were left stranded as railway tracks and roads leading to the international airport and other major roads were submerged in water. More than 20 schools were closed in the western province due to the floods. The government of Sri Lanka has distributed LKR 18 million (CHF 181,000) among the district secretaries of the affected areas to provide cooked food and dry rations to the affected individuals in coordination with the World Food Programme. The government has also set up 81 disaster relief centres for families who have lost their homes. In addition, army and naval troops, and boats were deployed for rescue missions in affected districts.

The worst hit districts are Colombo, Gampaha and Galle. In Colombo over 140,000 people were affected by the floods and more than 4,500 people are currently hosted in camps. Most of the key roads leading to and out of the city are submerged, preventing access by motor traffic. In Gampaha, some 190,000 people were affected, with 170 houses fully and partially damaged. More than 9,000 people forced out of their homes have been provided shelter in temporary camps set up by the government. Additionally, 23 naval teams and 22 navy boats are currently operating in the district providing relief assistance. 86,484 individuals have been affected in Galle district and more than 400 houses are fully and partially damaged.

The current weather conditions are expected to continue for days and may be prolonged with the monsoon season starting by the end of the week and continuing until September. The disaster management centre has issued an alert to people living in the Kalu Ganga and Gin Ganga basins to evacuate immediately due to the rising water levels and have earmarked Ratnapura, Kalutara and Galle as danger zones most vulnerable to landslips.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and its partner national societies are working together with the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS) to provide humanitarian relief to the people affected by the current disaster. The assistance is focused on four districts: Colombo, Galle, Gampaha and Kalutara.



SLRCS's Colombo city branch provides first aid services.
Photo: SLRCS



Distribution of cooked food to affected people in Kaduwela area in Colombo district. Photo: SLRCS

Acting quickly, SLRCS branches deployed its branch disaster response teams (BDRT) and divisional disaster response teams (DDRT) to assess the floods situation and to support the affected population with emergency relief items. The branches, in coordination with the headquarters and with the support from Movement partners, distributed food and non-food relief items to more than 10,000 individuals.

The Kalutara district branch deployed a 10-member BDRT to conduct assessments, distribution of food items and first aid services to the affected population. A total of 950 lunch/dinner packets were distributed on 18 May 2010. The branch also distributed 10 tents, 100 hygiene kits, 25 *sarees*, 25 *sarongs* and 25 bed sheets released from its warehouse in Ratmalana. Within this week, the branch plans to distribute dry rations to 500 families in Dodangoda, which is the worst-affected divisional secretariat.

The BDRT from Colombo district and city branch were deployed to assess the situation and to distribute cooked food items. Breakfast, lunch and dinner packets were distributed to 3,600 people in Colombo. The district branch also provided dry rations to 1,400 families and tents to 14 families. The city branch has set up an emergency control room at branch level to coordinate with the government and other stakeholders. In Galle, a 10-member BDRT was deployed to conduct assessments.

The Gampaha district branch deployed a BDRT to gather information and assess the situation. The branch provided 4,500 cooked food packets and 50 dry rations packets, and supported the government with its food distribution. It provided transportation to the general public and an ambulance service for pregnant mothers. The branch also distributed 16,000 litres of drinking water, 500 hygiene packets, 150 sleeping mats, 232 sanitary packs, 800 jerry cans, 10 tents and 135 tarpaulins sheets to affected people. In the following days, the branch plans to provide dry rations to 12,000 individuals in Ja-Ella, Biyagama, Wattale, Gampaha, Minuwangoda and Divulapitoya divisional secretariat areas while continuing to provide drinking water, and first aid services.

The village disaster response teams formed through the SLRCS/IFRC community-based disaster risk management project in Biyagama South, Mabima and Yabaraluwa south also responded to the situation. The teams provided cooked food to affected people taking shelter in the evacuation centre, using project resources.

In addition to the immediate provision of relief supplies, SLRCS is planning to address the priority health issues that could impact on the affected people. These issues include problems of safe water supply and water-borne disease, particularly diarrhoeal disease. In addition, SLRCS will also be vigilant for any potential outbreak of Leptospirosis (a water-based disease), which is endemic in Sri Lanka and has had the highest burden of illness in Colombo, Gampha and Kalutara districts in the past (the same districts are affected by the floods currently). Leptospirosis is typically associated with heavy rainfall and flooding in Sri Lanka¹ – though it is accepted that the scarcity of available information makes it difficult to ascertain the numbers of people who have been assisted, still need assistance, and how many will be assisted .

SLRCS plans to deploy volunteers with first aid materials, especially oral rehydration solution, to assist possible diarrhoea cases in the immediate future. With water sources being contaminated due to the floods, SLRCS aims to focus on cleaning homes and wells to provide access to clean drinking water and prevent the spread of diseases. Volunteers trained in community-based health and first aid will also carry out health promotion interventions in the affected community with the aim of augmenting community knowledge on water-borne and water-based diseases and promoting the use of safe drinking water.

SLRCS will be working jointly with USAID Sri Lanka office to address the needs of the affected populations. A meeting was held between SLRCS governance and senior management, US ambassador and USAID country head to discuss cooperation between the two organizations. SLRCS and Federation representatives participated in the coordination meeting organized by the government to share knowledge and work together in providing effective relief to people affected by the floods.

¹ Leptospirosis Factsheet. National epidemiological unit, ministry of health and nutrition. www.epid.gov.lk

How we work

All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGOs\) in Disaster Relief](#) and the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

The IFRC's vision is to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by National Societies, with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.

The IFRC's work is guided by [Strategy 2020](#) which puts forward three strategic aims:

1. Save lives, protect livelihoods, and strengthen recovery from disaster and crises.
2. Enable healthy and safe living.
3. Promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace.

Contact information

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[<map below; click here to return to the title page or contact information](#)

