

MEXICO: HURRICANE PAULINE

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The Disaster

Hurricane Pauline, widely reported as Mexico's worst natural disaster in a decade, is now receding after leaving a trail of death and destruction up to 50 km inland from the country's Pacific coastline. Hardest hit has been the cities of Acapulco and Oaxaca, where, according to latest reports this morning, some 400 people are dead and hundreds injured, with 50,000 left homeless. In Guerrero state, 41 cm of rain fell in 24 hours sending flood waters and mudslides through shanty towns on the slopes above Acapulco Bay, as the hurricane, packing winds of more than 180 kph tore through the coast. The disaster, significantly worse than expected, struck just one week after Tropical Storm Olaf hit the same area, bringing a double dose of misery to vulnerable communities.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Mexican Red Cross volunteers and staff were rapidly into action deploying search and rescue teams in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. The Society continues to provide food, water, and other necessities, like clothing, blankets and water purification supplies, milk powder and other non-perishable foods, blankets, and medical supplies to hurricane victims staying in government-run shelters in the states of Guerrero, Oaxaca and Chiapas. To date 100 tonnes of Red Cross relief supplies have been distributed to Hurricane Pauline victims. With Tropical Storm Olaf hitting the same area last week, relief stocks were on hand. Trained Red Cross disaster relief workers are in the affected areas while additional Red Cross workers are arriving from throughout Mexico. Just hours into the catastrophe supplies and relief workers traversed flooded regions by boat to reach the most devastated areas. Red Cross medical personnel are providing first aid/triage to the injured while the Society is also supporting sheltering operations to house and feed hundreds of displaced people. In addition, the Mexican Red Cross is following up large numbers of disaster welfare enquiries with vigour.

Yesterday (Friday), the American Red Cross announced that it is sending an initial donation of US\$ 25,000 to the Mexican Red Cross to assist with immediate operational needs. At the request of the Mexican Society, the American Red Cross is forwarding reinforced plastic sheeting for temporary roof and house repairs as well as mops, brooms, buckets, sponges, bleach and cleaning chemicals to support the massive clean-up efforts in the days ahead. Offers of assistance have been received also from the German Red Cross and the European Community. The International Federation's Geneva Secretariat remains on stand by over this weekend.

Needs

The Mexican Red Cross, with a strong track record in disaster preparedness and response, has launched a **domestic** appeal, which has been well supported and enabled a fast and effective early reaction. At this stage, an international appeal is not envisaged since the Society has the capacity to cope with the immediate needs. However, given the magnitude of the disaster, an extensive rehabilitation/ reconstruction exercise can be anticipated and a request for international support may emerge in the coming days.

The International Federation - through its Americas department - will continue to keep sister Red Cross Red Crescent Societies fully informed as events unfold. Please contact desk officer Jan Schütt (tel: 41-22-730-4428; email: schuett@ifrc.org) if further feedback is required.

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