

PHILIPPINES: TYPHOON & FLOODS

26 October 1998

ALERT

The Disaster

At a time when approximately 192,000 families (925,000 persons) were struggling to recover from the effects of typhoon *Zeb* (*see Information Bulletin No. 1 issued 15 October*) which devastated Northern Luzon last week, the same population has been hit by typhoon *Babs* (the ninth and strongest typhoon to hit the Philippines in 1998).

Typhoon *Babs*, which has been in the Philippines for a number of days, struck the Bicol region and Central Luzon as it made landfall in the last two days. It brought strong winds of 195-235 kilometres per hour and unrelenting rains which resulted in massive floods and landslides.

An estimated 134 people have been killed (mostly by landslides), 40,000 houses have been destroyed and some 94,959 families (441,940 persons) from 485 villages have been affected. Whilst 514 evacuation centres have been opened, massive evacuation is still on-going as the Agno, Pampanga, Cagayan and Bicol river basins continue to swell and threaten low-lying areas.

Northern, central and other parts of Luzon continue to experience strong winds and heavy rain though typhoon *Babs* is already over the South China Sea. Thousands of families are being evacuated to higher ground as river water levels continue to rise.

Relief operations and co-ordination are severely affected by power and communication failures in the entire areas of Bicol, as well as in Marinduque, Aklan, Northern Samar, Northern Leyte, including Metro Manila. Transportation is also hampered in the Cagayan Valley, Bicol, Southern Tagalog, Samar and Panay islands when roads became impassable due to fallen posts, uprooted trees, landslides, eroded roads and collapsed bridges.

Catanduanes province suffered most from *Babs*' effects and 80% of the houses were swept away by its strong winds, leaving some 10,320 families (61,920 persons) homeless. It was also reported that 56 persons were buried due to landslides while two others were missing in Pato, San Miguel and Virac towns. Transportation and communication have been cut off since the Bato river overflowed.

In Pangasinan province, 37,270 families (223,620 persons) were left homeless as a result of the two previous typhoons (*Vicki* and *Zeb*), and damage to agriculture and infrastructure have been estimated at more than PHP 2 billion (approximately CHF 64 million). At least 10 low-lying towns are now under flood alert after Binga and Ambuklao dams released one-metre of water due to unrelenting rains associated with typhoon *Babs*.

Government Action

The Government of the Republic of the Philippines declared the worst affected areas under a state of emergency in order to facilitate the release of local and national disaster funds to hasten relief and rehabilitation efforts.

Through the Disaster Co-ordinating Councils, the line government launched massive emergency response operations to rescue and evacuate thousands of families rendered homeless by strong winds or whose houses were inundated by floodwaters. Town and barangay halls, schools, churches and community centres were opened as evacuation centres.

The President and the Chairman of the National Disaster Co-ordinating Council flew to Catanduanes in order to assess the extent of damages. Field health and welfare workers were immediately mobilised to extend services to families and individuals in need of emergency assistance.

Local government units (LGUs) dealing with the aftermath of one typhoon after another, are at the brink of exhaustion since rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts need to be re-directed towards providing relief. LGUs are pleading for national government and private sector support to help disaster victims since their meagre disaster funds have already been utilised.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

- { The Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC), through its 40 Chapters in Luzon and the Visayas, mobilised rescue and response teams which conducted rapid needs and damage assessments, assisted in evacuation and rescue of trapped families and distributed emergency food to evacuees. These teams have already provided 6,093 families (35,500 persons) with rice, canned goods, instant noodles and coffee. An additional 1,500 people in Sorsogon and Camarines Norte provinces were also given food assistance.
- { The National Headquarters released CHF 21,000 for the purchase of rice, canned goods and instant noodles for the homeless. This is in addition to CHF 195,000 worth of relief items released/delivered to the affected areas as preparedness stocks have been depleted. The NHQ also replenished Metro Manila relief stocks which were exhausted due to the high number of evacuated families.
- { The Federation's Regional delegation in Kuala Lumpur has mobilised its disaster preparedness and information delegates to assist with initial reporting and formulation of the expected relief operation.

Needs

Whilst further information is still coming in, given the magnitude of the damage caused by the successive typhoons there is clearly a need to launch a major relief and rehabilitation operation. Whilst the PNRC has the expertise and manpower to undertake an operation, considerable financial and material resources will be urgently needed by the National Society.

As relief teams continue to access the devastated areas it is expected that an Appeal for assistance will be launched within two days. This will largely comprise of relief assistance, including food and housing materials to ensure survival of those most affected and to assist them in re-building their communities.

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