



VIET NAM: AVIAN INFLUENZA

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The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 183 countries.

In Brief

This DREF Bulletin is being issued to signal the release of CHF 250,000 (USD 190,000 or EUR 160,000) from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) to support the work of Viet Nam Red Cross in its efforts to combat and mitigate avian influenza. The programme is expected to be completed within three months, and a final report will be made available. Unearmarked funds to repay DREF are encouraged.

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For longer-term programmes in this or other countries or regions, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal. For support to or for further information concerning Federation programmes or operations in this or other countries, or for national society profiles, please also access the Federation's website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

The situation

Viet Nam is the country which has been hardest hit by avian influenza. Since December 2004, outbreaks of the disease have been reported in the country, with 66 confirmed human cases in 32 cities and provinces. The total number of deaths from avian influenza in Viet Nam now stands at 42.

Avian influenza has killed thousands of birds. At the same time, the culling of hundreds of thousands of fowl in the country to curtail the spread of the disease has added up to a significant material loss for thousands of households who are already poor. The authorities in Viet Nam, together with the support of other governments and organizations, have been involved in activities aimed at the eradication of the H5N1 virus responsible for the disease. This is accomplished through the vaccination of poultry. While this is a necessary and hopefully effective action, health authorities and



The people of Viet Nam are constantly exposed to the threat of avian influenza. However, their awareness on the risks of the disease is very low.

experts stated that good hygiene and information to the population on measure to avoid contamination from poultry to human is the best way to minimize the risk of a pandemic. Viet Nam is the country where the virus appeared first and where the most people have been infected. Of those infected, 44 per cent of them died. Many also believe that Viet Nam is the country where the pandemic will most likely develop first.

Since a 15-year old boy from Hai Phong province contracted the illness in December 2005, the government has determined that the risk of an outbreak remains high because of several factors including environmental conditions as well as ongoing concerns over the health of wild migratory birds. As a result, the deputy prime minister of Viet Nam has signed a decision on 21 February 2006 to establish an 18-member national steering committee to deal with the issue of avian influenza. The Viet Nam Red Cross (VNRC) and representatives from various government ministries are members of the committee. As such, the national society is in a position to influence the humanitarian response at government level as well as through countrywide community outreach through its volunteers.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action taken so far

VNRC has scaled up its activities by conducting a host of avian influenza awareness campaigns to minimize the risk of a pandemic. The Federation's country delegation and other donors are supporting these initiatives. The national society is also part of a national forum to educate and provide the public with simple and clear messages on how they can protect themselves, their families, neighbours and friends. The efforts have been thus far been effective, with no new human case detected since late December 2005. However, given the country's high vulnerability to a pandemic, further financial support is sought to allow VNRC to implement, among other activities, further avian influenza awareness campaigns.

The needs

VNRC, with the support of the Federation, prepared a plan of action and provisional emergency appeal for avian influenza in November 2005. The programme was eventually incorporated into the Viet Nam Annual Appeal 2006-2007. To date, only the German Red Cross has contributed, allocating EUR 110,000 to protect Vietnamese communities from avian influenza. The national society is well positioned to carry out their planned activities effectively. It has previous substantial experience on outbreak control (such as malaria and SARS) and its large base of volunteers has access to remote and vulnerable communities.

The following are the national society's planned activities:

- Assess public awareness at grass-root level.
- Develop and produce dissemination materials that will be distributed by VNRC volunteers along with supplies of soap in selected districts and communes.
- Train VNRC staff and volunteers in training-of-trainers, and avian influenza education and prevention.
- Conduct community outreach.
- Hold public dissemination campaigns through the media and established loudspeakers system country-wide.
- Provide intensive training on avian influenza prevention and public education for VNRC key health staff.
- Facilitate and provide technical support to provincial chapters in developing avian influenza preparedness plans.
- Distribute protective items (masks/gloves) for all Red Cross staff members at central and provincial levels and trained Red Cross volunteers in the target locations.

In addition, to making a difference at its own community level, VNRC can provide a role model for other national societies gearing up around avian influenza.

Coordination

The Federation and VNRC will cooperate to ensure coordination of effective action and that simple, consistent messages are sent to vulnerable people. Furthermore, the country delegation and the national society have maintained close contacts with the UN Development Programme and other NGOs for information exchange.

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