

# GUYANA: EL NIÑO DROUGHT

appeal no: 14/98  
22 April 1998

**THIS APPEAL SEEKS CHF 1,090,000  
TO ASSIST 7,500 BENEFICIARIES  
FOR SIX MONTHS**

## Summary

Drought provoked by El Niño and grassland and forest fires are ruining Guyana's economy, depriving thousands of people, many of them indigenous Amerindians, of their livelihoods and raising the spectre of widespread destitution and famine. The operation funded by this Appeal will provide food parcels, seeds and farming tools in the worst hit areas, help in restoring water supplies and support public health measures to prevent diseases propagated by the disaster.

## The Disaster

The El Niño phenomenon has produced unprecedented drought conditions throughout Guyana. Rainfall was 50% below normal last year, and rainfall this March was 85% lower than usual. This has resulted in severe water shortages that are affecting 80% of the population (759,000 inhabitants) and having dramatic effects on the economy. On 26 March, the President of Guyana declared a state of national emergency.



Guyana is one of the poorest countries in the western Hemisphere (it is placed 104 out of 175 countries in the 1997 UNDP rating) and has a per capita gross domestic product of only USD 570 million (1993). The sugar, rice and gold industries, the main foreign exchange earners for Guyana, are all feeling the impact of the drought

Cumulatively, the rains between August 1997 and February this year were 75% below the normal precipitation. Rains have been forecast for the May/June period, but are expected to be about 20% below normal. The lack of rain is not only creating shortages of drinking water but is also reducing food supplies, as sea water moves upstream into agricultural areas and crops fail.

The most severely affected areas are Region 1 (north-west) and Region 9 (south-west), home to some 23,000 indigenous Amerindians, where, in addition to drought, fires have been raging. Crops and livestock have suffered, significantly reducing food supplies. People employed in mining, agriculture (especially subsistence farming), forestry and fishing are seriously affected.

#### **Damage to Agricultural Production**

Rice and sugar, the main export crops, are the most severely impacted. Officials of the Guyana Rice Development Board estimate that rice production for the spring season will fall by 37%, a loss of USD 22 million, and GUYSUCO anticipates a drop in the annual sugar production of 5%, a loss of USD 7 million. In addition, losses of livestock and crops such as cassava, coconut and coffee have been reported. Food supplies, already in short supply in the hinterland, are almost exhausted and malnutrition is expected to re-emerge in many vulnerable areas, in particular among women and children left to fend for themselves while menfolk seek work.

#### **Damage to Water Systems**

Drinking water shortages are occurring throughout the country, and particularly in the capital, Georgetown. Rivers, creeks and ponds have shrunk and in some instances have dried up completely or have been contaminated by sea water, while wells and springs have run dry in hinterland areas. Unsafe drinking water and the risk of waterborne or water-related diseases constitute health threats: an increased number of malaria and Dengue fever outbreaks have been reported. Depleted river levels are also hindering the use of waterways for transportation purposes.

#### **Damage to Mining**

Officials say exports of gold, Guyana's most lucrative export, could drop 40%. Gold is mainly mined in rivers, and many river tributaries have dried up. Rivers used by miners and loggers to transport equipment are also dry, forcing companies to close and miners to leave their families to seek employment in neighbouring countries.

#### **Damage to Forestry**

Forest fires have swept across the country for weeks, destroying state forests, farmland and assets.

## ***The Response so far***

#### **Government Action**

In its declaration of a state of national emergency on 26 March, the Government of Guyana requested regional and international assistance to cope with the crisis. It has already committed approx. USD 1,000,000 to an emergency programme to deliver water to the most affected areas of Greater Georgetown and USD 350,000 for the hinterland communities. Some food has been collected locally and distributed through the Civil Defence Commission and the Guyana Defence Forces.

**Red Cross/Red Crescent Action w**

Guyana Red Cross volunteers have begun assessments in Amerindian villages in Region 9. The Kingston Regional Delegation assisted the National Society in developing a Plan of Action by providing the services of a regional resource person. USD 10,000 was reallocated by the Federation (from left-over relief funds) towards the Guyana Red Cross to facilitate the immediate supply of food and other necessities to those most in need. As of Monday 6 April the Guyana Red Cross had organised two convoys (two trucks in each, supported by volunteers) mainly carrying food relief for a total of 200 families in region 9. Another convoy is expected to leave Georgetown later this week. The distributions will continue until the funds are exhausted.

A Canadian Red Cross first aid instructor has arrived in the country for a scheduled mission originally intended to train trainers. Because of the situation, he will focus on community based first aid, health prevention and sanitation, thus enhancing the Society's capacity to provide health advice in vulnerable communities.

**Other Agencies' Action w**

A meeting of international donors, attended by IDB, PAHO/WHO, UNICEF, WFP, UK DFID and the EU, was convened by the UN Resident Co-ordinator in Georgetown to discuss support to Guyana during the present emergency. Assistance for the provision of water and the rehabilitation of the agricultural sector has been pledged as follows:

<b>DONOR</b>	<b>Pledged assistance (as of 27.03.98)</b>	<b>Value (in USD)</b>
UNDP	Resources for evaluation, donor co-ordination, and planning	65,000
UNICEF	Hand pumps	60,000
CDERA	{ 5 gallon water bottles (200) { 3,000 gallon water bladders (2) { support to dislocated victims	3,500
IDB	{ Submersible pumps (2) { Digging 2 wells for Georgetown { Paddy seeds { Guyana's balance of payments	
WFP	Provision of paddy seeds and food rations	
CIDA (Canada)	{ Submersible pumps (2) { Mobile pumps (2) { Spare kits { Potable water projects (2) for Amerindians	140,000
Norway Govt.	Emergency grant	20,000

The Inter-American Development Bank has agreed to reallocate about USD 5 million, approved for sea and river defence projects, to the relief effort.

Based on discussions with the Civil Defence Commission on outstanding needs, the Co-ordinating Unit of CDERA is launching an appeal for water containers, water pumps and relief supplies.

The EU country representative has indicated possibilities for support to the disaster.

## **Co-ordination w**

The Civil Defence Commission (CDC) has been given full responsibility for the co-ordination and management of the response to the disaster at the national level. A National Response Committee has been established, which includes all sectors, the UN Donor Group and Voluntary Organisations. All Red Cross work is closely co-ordinated with the Civil Defence Commission.

## ***The Intended Operation***

### **Assessment of Needs •**

The Government of Guyana has identified potable water and relief supplies for the affected population in all 10 regions of Guyana as the most pressing need. This includes relief food supplies, agricultural inputs for sustained economic activity (seeds and tools), portable water pumps, inflatable water bladders, water purification means and transport to deliver supplies to outlying areas. Fire fighting equipment and technical expertise, and improved HF and VHF radio communication equipment are also needed.

### **Immediate Needs •**

The most immediate needs are those of the farmers and their families who will have no local sources of food until October, or later if the normal rainfall does not occur in May.

### **Anticipated Later Needs •**

The families of the most affected rice and sugar farmers (2,500 families, or 12,500 persons, of whom the operation plans to assist 1,500 families, or 7,500 persons) will need relief assistance for the next six months and farmers will need paddy seed for the next cropping season. Farming tools and household items will be required by those who lost their homes and possessions in the fires.

An increase in some health problems arising from stagnant water, in addition to the decline in food intake, will increase malnutrition cases. People need to be informed about how to protect their health.

## ***Red Cross Objectives***

- | To provide food security to 1,500 families in South Rupununi region.
- | To assist with public health measures to prevent outbreaks of water-borne diseases.
- | To co-ordinate and avoid duplication of effort with other national and international agencies.

## ***National Society/Federation Plan of Action***

### **Emergency Phase: *April 1998 w***

The most critically affected areas are in the south-west (regions 8 and 9) where acute shortages of food and potable water are threatening almost the entire population, mainly indigenous communities, with destitution and the spectre of starvation. These areas have been earmarked for immediate assistance. In the short term, the Guyana Red Cross will focus on providing supplementary food rations and potable water, paying particular attention to the needs of the elderly, children, and pregnant women.

The following activities are planned:

- { to launch a supplementary food parcel programme for the most vulnerable population -- 1,500 families -- in the South Rupununi region;
- { to assist with providing a safe drinking water supply (by providing water containers and water purification tablets) for the affected population;
- { to assist in providing health information and education.
- { The Federation will also look at what measures are needed to reinforce the operational capacity of the Guyana Red Cross, particularly in the areas of logistics and the relief training of Red Cross volunteers.

**Phase Two: *May - September 1998* w**

- { Longer-term assistance will concentrate on helping people to return to their homes and resume their livelihoods. It will:
  - { continue to distribute supplementary rations to 1,500 families (this figure is likely to increase as the situation deteriorates in marginal communities)
  - { provide replacement farming implements, seeds and household items to an estimated 50 families victims of fires
  - { produce and disseminate health and safety tips to prevent the occurrence of any water-related or fire-related health problems
- { monitor and evaluate the programme's implementation in collaboration with the Guyana Red Cross.

**Capacity of the National Society w**

The Guyana Red Cross has a warehouse, vehicles, HF and VHF radio-communication equipment, and active volunteers, and it has an established Disaster Committee. It has met with the Civil Defence Commission and is in regular touch with representatives of the National Response Committee.

This relief operation will represent a major organisational challenge and the Society will need sustained support from the Regional Delegation.

**Present Capacity of the Federation w**

The Federation is represented in the region by its Kingston Regional Delegation. The Head of the Delegation, the Finance Delegate and the Disaster Preparedness Delegate will assist in management reporting and financial administration.

**Evaluation w**

The Guyana Red Cross and the Federation will monitor the distributions. Evaluations will take place and reports will be issued at the end of each phase of the operation, i.e. May and October 1998.

***Immediate Action***

The Federation has reallocated USD 10,000 for the immediate distribution of supplementary food supplies and other necessities. The first distributions have already taken place: food parcels have been given to 255 families (1,275 persons) in three regions.

***Budget Summary***

See Annex 1 for details.

## *Conclusion*

As in other parts of the world, weather conditions generated by El Niño have caused severe damage to Guyana's agricultural infrastructure and output, but because this is a slow impact disaster, its victims are receiving less media and donor attention. Their needs are however just as urgent as those arising from more dramatic disasters. They must be given rapid help, in tandem with the rehabilitation of the economy, especially the agricultural sector.

Once additional information has been received from the disaster areas in the course of the next few weeks, this preliminary appeal will be revised accordingly. Meanwhile, donors are requested to support this appeal with cash donations to the Secretariat in Geneva (in kind only after prior consultation), since all the required relief goods can be purchased in the country or region.

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