

# INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies  
Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge  
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja  
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

## AZERBAIJAN/CAUCASUS: FLOODS

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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 180 countries.*

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### ***In Brief***

**The bulletin is for information only. The Red Crescent mobilised resources to respond to the disaster locally.**

### **The Situation**

Heavy snowfalls and rains during winter and spring caused the Kura and Araz rivers to flood eleven districts in south eastern Azerbaijan. The floods triggered landslides in certain regions. The worst affected districts were Sabirabad, Salyan and Neftchala. According to preliminary assessments<sup>1</sup>, more than 6,000 families were affected, some 2,000 houses were damaged and 3,000 hectares of agricultural land was submerged, destroying crops.



***Disaster: floods in south eastern Azerbaijan submerged 3,000 hectares of agricultural land, destroying crops.***

<sup>1</sup> Source: Government of Azerbaijan.

Pressure generated by the floods caused sub-soil waters to emerge in villages along the rivers, exposing the population to health risks. As the affected areas do not have a proper canalization system - people use traditional toilets in their gardens - the stagnant sub-soil waters increased the risk of infectious disease as well as some chronic illness.

Villagers also lacked safe water after the floods. Traditionally, people took water for domestic use from the rivers. However, water sources were polluted after villagers pumped the stagnant sub-soil water into the rivers. The situation now is under control. The level of the rivers has been steadily decreasing and the population has safe access to potable water again.

Supported by the United National Development Programme (UNDP) and a German NGO GTZ (German Cooperation on Technical Support), the Government of Azerbaijan formed a team of experts to assess impact of the floods on the population in Sabirabad, Salyan, Nefchala, Ali-Bayramli, Kurdamir, Saatli and Yevlakh. The team reported that 115 villages and 8,066 households were affected and 18,141 hectares of house yards and sown areas were damaged. It also identified short and long term needs and recommended a focus on:

- prevention of the spread of infectious disease;
- provision of potable water;
- rehabilitation of house yards and sown areas, and
- strengthening of disaster preparedness among the population, through education and training.

The local authorities estimated that total damage and losses reached USD 30 million. The Government has been making efforts to mitigate the impact of the disaster. It allocated 20 billion Manats (about USD 4 million) to buy 100 vehicles and construction equipment to strengthen the Araks and Kura riverbanks. The State Emergency Commission on Emergency Cases has focused on rehabilitation/repair of residential and public buildings. The Government provided 2 billion Manats (about USD 400,000) in cash to those families most affected.

The needs on the ground, however, overwhelmed capacities of local authorities. The government appealed for international assistance to help.

## **Red Cross and Red Crescent action**

The Azerbaijan Red Crescent Society was one of the few humanitarian actors that offered assistance. Staff and volunteers of the Red Crescent were first on the scene providing first aid and distributing emergency relief supplies, such as blankets, kitchen sets, gas-stoves, hygiene sets and food to vulnerable families. Initially, the focus was on 18 families (91 people), who had been evacuated from the Subh island in Nefchala, as danger to their health and lives was too great.



*Disaster mitigation: Red Crescent volunteers strengthen dams in flood-affected villages*

Immediately after the floods, the Azerbaijan Red Crescent supported by the Federation, dispatched assessment teams. In May 2003, the national society developed an emergency response plan to help 500 homeless families who found shelter with families and friends, or were temporarily accommodated in public buildings, local hospitals and schools. Those 500 families - 250 in Neftchala region, 150 in Sabirabad and 100 in Salyan - were identified in cooperation with the Government's regional executive committees.

The Red Crescent presented its plan to local donors and counterparts and requested emergency assistance. Partner national societies, such as the Turkish Red Crescent and Iranian Red Crescent, responded. The Turkish Red Crescent provided CHF 5,000 (USD 3,812). The Iranian Red Crescent sent trucks with 200 tents, 1,000 blankets, 500 water containers, 1,000 plastic sheets, 1,000 prefabricated toilets and 500 blankets for families whose houses were destroyed. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) granted additional USD 25,000 to provide affected families with shovels, rubber boots, blankets, bed sheets and hygiene sets. Total assistance provided through the Red Crescent was an estimated USD 68,374.

With support of partners, the Azerbaijan Red Crescent assisted 100 families in Salyan, Sabirabad and Neftchala with detergents, hygiene sets, buckets, mosquito nets, plastic bags and rubber boots, as well as, 50 shovels and 40 wheelbarrows to strengthen riverbanks and their houses. Also, 13 fully equipped tents were constructed in Sheki, Khachmaz and Neftchala to offer temporary shelter for families, whose houses had been destroyed. Additionally, the Azerbaijan Red Crescent supplied residents of Salyan district with 300 pairs of rubber boots from their own emergency stocks.



***Improving life: Red Crescent helps those affected by floods with basic relief supplies.***

With the funds provided by the USAID, the Red Crescent, supported by the Federation, helped another 400 people with blankets, bed sheets, rubber boots, hygiene sets, detergents, shovels, jerry cans and mosquito nets. Beneficiary lists were prepared by the Red Crescent local committees in cooperation with local authorities.

200 families in Neftchala district received an additional 1,600 meters of mosquito nets, which remained after the main distribution had finished.

Using shovels and wheelbarrows, provided by the Red Crescent, 100 families were able to strengthen riverbanks and protect their houses from destruction. The emergency relief items and hygiene supplies distributed by the Red Crescent helped 500 families be less vulnerable to infectious diseases. Beneficiaries expressed gratitude for the support and were pleased with the quality of the items.

Although the operation was of an emergency nature, it provided a good opportunity for the Red Crescent to strengthen its disaster management capacities by putting in practice their knowledge and skills. The operation offered a valuable experience for the Red Crescent's mobile volunteer teams, as well as, its health and disaster management departments, to improve their capacities through direct participation in needs assessment, mobilization of communities to strengthen riverbanks and distribution. Additionally, 20 Red Crescent volunteers in Sabirabad were trained on how to conduct anti-malaria spraying. The Azerbaijan Red Crescent's committees in floods-affected areas have strengthened links with local communities. In the early days after the disaster, they mobilized pupils to collect empty sacks, fill them with sand and put them along river banks. The Red Crescent enhanced cooperation with government authorities and other stakeholders too. The operation strengthened the Red Crescent's role in emergency situations. It also improved the image of the National Society as a credible partner of vulnerable people.

The operation underscored the importance of effective disaster preparedness and coordination, internally between the headquarters and local committees, as well as, with external stakeholders. It showed there is a need to have well-prepared and equipped mobile teams available to respond rapidly. Also it has shown the necessity to raise awareness within local communities on disaster preparedness and response, particularly during floods. It is important to continue and improve training on disaster preparedness for communities, as well as, the Red Crescent's mobile technical teams. This year, the Red Crescent is planning to conduct several workshops in cooperation with specialists from *Fovgal* association, a local counterpart of the Azerbaijan Red Crescent.

## **Coordination**

The Federation and the Azerbaijan Red Crescent Society worked in partnership with government authorities, United Nations agencies and other NGOs as part of a coordinated effort to confront the humanitarian challenges caused by the floods. Red Crescent local committees had good cooperation with local health authorities. Joint health promotion/education activities on malaria and safe water prevented the outbreak of infectious diseases.

The Federation was one of the main sources of information for the NGO community on the impact of the floods and plight of affected population. After the Federation issued its first information bulletin on the floods, Medicine Sans Frontiers-Belgium (MSF-Belgium) sent a team from Moscow to explore the epidemiological situation in the flooded areas. Following the assessment, the MSF-Belgium conducted a spraying against mosquitoes in 14 villages and three IDP (internally displaced persons) camps in August 2003. Twenty groups, supplied with necessary equipment and chemicals, were involved in this initiative, including 20 trained volunteers of the Red Crescent and 20 experienced sprayers from Sabirabad Hygiene and Epidemiology Centre (SHEC). Additionally, 22,000 booklets and 2,000 posters on prevention of malaria and intestinal diseases were distributed. The spraying averted an outbreak of malaria in 14 villages. As a result of the Federation's advocacy initiatives, 16,000 IDP families living in three camps of the Sabirabad region were also included in the campaign.

The Norwegian Humanitarian Enterprise supported financially a visit of a group of specialists from the Ganja Institute of Agriculture to Sabirabad, Salyan and Neftchala to assess damage caused to the agricultural sector and develop recommendations for assistance.

At the Government's request, the World Bank seconded an irrigation specialist to the flooded areas. Following discussions with stakeholders and visits to affected districts, the specialist concluded that the situation is under control, both in the delta of the Kura river, as well as, upstream in the reservoirs, and does not represent any immediate concern. However, structural works were recommended to restore the natural flow of water to the Caspian Sea which had been upset by the floods.

The Red Crescent will continue strengthening links with government authorities to provide coordinated, efficient and effective response to future emergencies. The most important is to develop a national disaster management plan that would define roles and responsibilities of the Government, the Azerbaijan Red Crescent and other stakeholders in disaster preparedness and response.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see [www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)

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