

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: FLOODS

16 May 2003

Information Bulletin N° 1

Disaster Relief Emergency Funds (DREF) allocated: N/A

This Bulletin is for information only. A request for emergency assistance was prepared and presented to local donors and counterparts of Azerbaijan Red Crescent and the Federation.

The Situation

Persistent heavy downpours and snow have caused the Kura and Araz rivers, the biggest in Azerbaijan, to flood. As a result, 11 districts have been affected by flooding and landslides, the worst being in Salyan, Neftchala, Sabirabad, Zardab, Ali Bayramly and Kurdamir (in the south-east of Azerbaijan). Two elderly people - in Muganganjali and Sabirabad regions – have died from shock. More than 6,000 families living along the Kura were affected and 1,000 ha of crops were flooded. Generally, there is a lack of potable water. The Kura and Araz increased to 3-4 metres, flooding 4 million square metres of land, leaving more than 300 houses under water. Water pressure also caused sub-soil waters to flood the surrounding area.

The risk of infectious diseases such as diarrhoea and malaria is high. The wet has also increased the number of cases of rheumatism and arthritis. In Salyan city, 2,500 families are affected. Approximately 2,000 ha of farm land is under water. Almost 1,600 houses have been damaged, of which 60 are destroyed. In Neftchala, 18 families were evacuated from Subh Island and temporarily settled in public buildings. Agricultural businesses, roads, bridges and other infrastructure have been extensively damaged.

The weather is expected to be warmer than average, accelerating the thawing of snow - up to 6 metres in parts – creating a further risk of flooding. In the Mingechaur reservoir where the water is regulated, levels reached a critical point.

The Government of Azerbaijan mobilised the Civil Defence to assist the population. The authorities also provided affected zones with assistance, pumps and machinery to reinforce river banks. They also built barrages and have begun to reconstruct damaged infrastructure. The assistance is insufficient for the needs. The Government of Azerbaijan has asked for assistance from international organisations as well as the European Union, the UN and the World Bank. An MSF Belgium health team visited the affected areas and made a preliminary damage assessment.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Disaster Preparedness Division of Azerbaijan Red Crescent Society (AzRC) conducted assessments on April 15, 16, 29 and 30, pinpointing 500 extremely vulnerable families. On May 6, a working group of the AzRC and Federation again visited the Salyan, Neftchala and Sabirabad branches and met heads of local authorities. A request for emergency assistance was prepared and presented to local donors and counterparts of AzRC and Federation.

Local partners such as Statoil, ExxonMobil, USAID and national societies in the region such as Turkish Red Crescent and Iranian Red Crescent have responded favourably to the request for assistance and contributions are already being received. Within the coming week much needed items such as shovels, wheel barrows, plastic sheeting and rubber boots will be ready for distribution.

AzRC medical unit members addressed the Ministry of Health concerning the danger of malaria and other infectious diseases and offered their assistance. There are two regional centres, Sabirabad and Lenkoran, and three branches in the affected area with mobile volunteer teams trained in first aid and disaster response.

Staff of the two regional centres, three branch committees and AzRC volunteers have worked with local authority representatives in the affected areas. The chairman of the Salyan branch committee of the AzRC has mobilised school pupils and volunteers to collect empty sacks, fill them with sand and barricade vulnerable places against flooding. The AzRC provided relief assistance such as blankets, kitchen sets, gas stoves, hygiene sets and food to 18 vulnerable families (91 people) evacuated from Subh island in Neftchala.

The situation is being closely monitored, and in case of further deterioration and based on assessments an international Emergency Appeal may be launched if local funding proves to be insufficient.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see www.ifrc.org

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All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.