

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

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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 181 countries.

In Brief

This Information Bulletin (no. 04/2004) is being issued for information only. The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

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The Situation

Nicaragua has been hit by a continuing series of tropical waves since the middle of June, which brought heavy rain and caused flooding and mudslides in several areas of the country. The first storms in mid June prompted the Nicaraguan government to declare a state of disaster on 4 July in the Departments of Matagalpa and the Autonomous Regions of the North and South Atlantic (RAAN and RAAS). In the Department of Matagalpa, the municipality of Río Blanco has been particularly badly hit with the heavy rains saturating the land and causing severe mudslides in the Cerro Musun, a mountainous area of natural reserve located northeast of Managua. As of the end of August, a total of 19 tropical waves had hit the country, causing the situation to further deteriorate and impeding planned relief operations.

There are currently 14 temporary shelters operating in Río Blanco and in six communities in the surrounding area. Only five of these shelters can be reached by vehicle via a rural route that is in very poor condition. The other nine shelters are only accessible by foot or by mule. The time needed to reach these isolated shelters ranges between two and eight hours. The total number of families housed in these shelters is 502, with a total of 2,379 persons. The situation in the shelters is critical because of over-population and the resulting precarious hygiene conditions. These conditions in the shelters, along with the on-going disaster situation over the past several months, are also severely impacting the psychological condition of many of the shelters' residents.

The most common illnesses in the affected areas are: parasitosis, diarrhoea, acute respiratory illnesses, headaches, fevers, micosis and dermatitis. The group most affected by these illnesses are children of up to 14 years of age.

Medical care is being provided by the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health, in coordination with the Nicaraguan Red Cross (NRC).

The Nicaraguan government and local authorities are carrying out negotiations to ensure the availability of land that has been identified for the relocation of affected families and the construction of temporary family shelters. This land is located in the municipality of Río Blanco, 30 km northeast of the urban centre. It is foreseen that this land will be available by mid September.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The Nicaraguan Red Cross revised its plan of action in August to respond to the increased needs of the population. The current plan of action seeks to provide relief to 450 of the most affected families in the Department of Matagalpa (approximately 2,315 persons). The plan of action is divided into two areas: relief and rehabilitation, and will focus particularly on the distribution of relief items and public health in emergencies. The plan of action is being supported by the Netherlands and Spanish Red Cross Societies, USAID/OFDA and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. Support from the Federation is being provided through Italian Cooperation emergency funds.

Relief goods to be distributed include:

- 450 food kits for 3 months
- 450 hygiene kits for 2 months
- 900 5-gallon water containers (2 per family)
- 450 kitchen kits
- 450 complementary relief kits for 1 month (items included in these kits are towels, brushes, blankets, rakes, buckets, and mats)

Public health in emergency activities to be carried out include:

- Production and distribution of safe water:
 - Production of 911,250 gallons of water in two months
 - Construction of community water distribution systems
- Community development
 - Community health: formation of community brigades to promote health and nutrition, as well as training. Psychosocial support will also be provided to affected persons, including particular psychosocial support strategies for children
 - Community disaster preparedness
 - Training of community brigades in the administration of shelters
- Construction of temporary shelters
 - Construction of temporary housing
 - Construction of latrines (1 latrine for 2 families)
 - Construction of community shower facilities
 - The possibility of constructing kitchens in the houses is also being studied.

A number of activities are currently being carried out by the Nicaraguan Red Cross. As regards clean drinking water, the NRC is providing potable water to temporary shelters and affected communities. There are currently two water plants located in the area which, in the third week of August, provided 29,200 litres of drinking water to 454 families. Since the beginning of the operation, 166,170 litres of drinking water have been distributed.

Coordination is taking place with local authorities and organizations active in the area. The NRC is currently coordinating with the local Mayor's office, the Nicaraguan Civil Defence, the Ministry of Health, the Municipal Commission for the Prevention of Disasters (COMUPRED), and NGOs present in the area. Inter institutional coordination is ongoing to inform local authorities of the work being carried out, to ensure that the best service is provided to families accommodated in shelters, and to avoid duplication of work.

Selection and packaging of used clothing is on-going. Clothing has been collected through various donations and is being delivered to families in shelters.

The NRC is working to update surveys taken of families located in shelters on a weekly basis in order to have an accurate understanding of the needs of the affected population.

In the coming weeks, the following activities are scheduled to be carried out, in accordance with the NRC plan of action:

- To continue distributing potable water to families in shelters and to affected communities.
- To begin distributing food items to families. This was scheduled to begin on 1 September and to continue for three months. According to the plan of action, food will first be distributed to shelters, and then later directly to families once they are in the temporary housing that is scheduled to be built.
- To begin work in training members of the affected communities. Workshops will first be carried out to train and strengthen the network of volunteers in the NRC branch in Río Blanco. These trainings will include the following themes: risk management, vulnerability and capacity assessments, basic first aid, damage and needs assessments in communities, and search and rescue. Later, training workshops will be carried out to train members of the community response committee in first aid and preparation for disasters. Finally, training sessions will be carried out for members of the health in shelters commissions to address the topics of community health, and health and nutrition in emergencies.
- To begin psychosocial support activities for families in shelters and in affected communities. Two kinds of activities will be carried out: the first is designed for adults and includes both group and individual support, using techniques used and validated during the relief operations following Hurricane Mitch in 1998. The second kind of psychosocial support is designed for children, and will also include both group and individual support. All this work is being carried out in coordination with the Ministry of Health and UNICEF.
- To begin work on construction of single-family temporary housing and latrines. This activity will take place once the government has formally decided on the location of these houses.
- To begin distributing hygiene, kitchen and complementary kits to families once they have been relocated to the newly constructed temporary housing.

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.

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