CAMEROON: PLANE CRASH IN MBANGA PONGO, DOUALA

FINAL REPORT

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 185 countries.

In Brief


History of this Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF)-funded operation:

- CHF 25,000 was allocated from the Federations DREF on 07 May, 2007 to respond to the needs of this operation. (See DREF Bulletin)
- This operation was expected to be implemented in 1 month, and completed by 07 June, 2007; in line with Federation reporting standards, the DREF Bulletin Final Report was due three months after the end of the operation (by 07 September, 2007).

This operation is aligned with the International Federation's Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

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All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) in Disaster Relief and is committed to
Background and Summary

In the night of 4 to 5 May 2007, a Kenya Airways passenger plane with 115 people on board crashed in a densely forested area of southern Cameroon. The Boeing 737-800 5 YKYA airliner was carrying 105 passengers of various nationalities and nine members of crew who were all Kenyans. The aircraft left Douala International Airport at 23:07 en route to Nairobi, Kenya, but disappeared from the radar screens of the control tower five minutes after taking off. Immediately after it was announced that the plane had disappeared from the radar, Cameroonian authorities organized a search and rescue operation. After 48 hours of search, the wreckage of the plane was found in a swampy area in Mbanga-Pongo, 23 kilometres from Douala. Reports from Cameroon Red Cross Society (CRCS) volunteers and first-aid workers, who were among the first to reach the macabre scene, indicated that none of the 115 passengers survived. It is suspected that bad weather could have caused the plane to crash.

Immediately after the disaster was announced, Government, the Red Cross and other actors mobilized to see whether some lives could be saved. Unfortunately none! However, the timely intervention of the Red Cross (Cameroon Red Cross supported by the Federation’s Central Africa Regional Representation) contributed to removing the corpses blown to pieces, thereby saving the surrounding populations from a potential contamination.

Coordination

Cameroon Government set up crisis committees in Yaoundé, Douala and other localities where the plane was first alleged to have crashed. The Cameroon Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation through its Department of Civil Protection (DPC) coordinated the intervention of humanitarian actors, the most active of which was Cameroon Red Cross supported by the International Federation. UN agencies and other international NGOs also intervened during the operation. A road map was developed to state clearly the roles and responsibilities of each actor. In the field, the National Fire Brigade, the Red Cross and the emergency unit of the Ministry of Health worked hand in hand to ensure efficient intervention.

Analysis of the operation - objectives, achievements and impact

Goal: To efficiently contribute to the search and recovery activities organized after the crash of the Kenya Airways plane in Douala

Objective: The victims of the crash are found and the survivors are taken care of.

Expected Result 1: Pick up and stretcher bearing is effective for all the victims found

Achievements: About 50 Cameroon Red Cross volunteers benefiting from the technical and financial support of the Federation’s Central Africa Regional Representation searched for the victims of the crash during four days, but were only able to find corpses that had been blown into pieces by the explosion of the plane. Ignoring the smell, they collected the pieces of bodies and arranged them into small bundles, which they then carried right to where the Government-sent medical team was waiting, i.e. three kilometres from the site of the disaster. Volunteers first treated the corpses, and put them into body bags before taking them to the medical team for identification and transport to the Laquintini Hospital that had been chosen for the occasion. The volunteers constituted and carried about 150 bundles of bodies as no corpse was found complete.
Expected result 2: All the victims found are packaged in body bags.

**Achievements:** Red Cross volunteers packaged all the corpses that they could find (about 150 bundles of bodies as no corpse was found complete), and delivered them to the medical team.

Expected result 3: Families and other relatives present on the field identify their corpses.

**Achievements:** After the hard work on the field, the families were allowed to identify their corpses at the Laquintini Hospital, but very few of them succeeded given the state in which the corpses had been found. There is no doubt that some corpses or parts of them are still in Mbanga Pongo (in the waters), as no one could find them.

Expected result 4: Families and other relatives of victims receive moral and psychological support.

**Achievements:** Cameroon Red Cross deployed 70 volunteers at the “Cercle Municipal de Douala” and at the Laquintini Hospital where they welcomed families and relatives of crash victims, listened to them, provided them with counselling, gathered the available information they needed, accompanied them and followed them up. In fact, the volunteers who had been trained to that effect provided psychological support to the families gathered to know what had become of their dear ones. Red Cross volunteers did this in close collaboration with the psychological support unit put in place by Government.

Expected result 5: Coffins are picked up and carried on stretchers with dignity.

**Achievements:** Although Red Cross volunteers did not find complete corpses, they handled the 150 bundles of pieces they could gather with the dignity every human being deserves.

**Impact and constraints of the operation**

Thanks to the quick and timely intervention of the Red Cross, some pieces of bodies were found and collected for proper burial. The Red Cross also drew the attention of Government to the fact that the site should not be accessed by the populations to avoid a risk of epidemics.

In addition, the Red Cross volunteers who participated in the operation appeared morally affected by the end because of what they had seen. Thus Red Cross authorities supported by the Federation’s Central Africa Regional Representation saw the need to call in psychologists to counsel and take proper care of the volunteers after the operation. It is in this respect that the Federation’s Regional Representative for Central Africa joined the volunteers in the field. The National President of Cameroon Red Cross did the same later.

This operation highly contributed to showing up the image of the Red Cross in Cameroon and in the world as the event was highly covered by several international media.

**Constraint**

The major constraints faced by Cameroon Red Cross were the poor communication between the teams on the field and the headquarters; as well as the lack of lap tops in the field to ensure accurate and timely reporting.
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