Summary

The worst typhoon in well over 100 years tore through southern Vietnam during the night of 2 November 1997. Winds of 160 kilometres per hour capsized boats on the open ocean and swept away tens of thousands of homes in the Mekong Delta. The intense precipitation reached a peak of 233 mm in the most hard-hit areas.

In the aftermath of Typhoon Linda, thousands of families, already eking out an existence at the margin - by fishing, day labour and tending small garden plots - have been left with no means of subsistence.

At the request of the Vietnam Red Cross (VNRC), the International Federation is seeking support for the National Society's on-going humanitarian assistance to the 30,000 of the most vulnerable and marginalised families in the seven hardest hit provinces of Kien Giang, Ca Mau, Bac Lieu, Soc Trang, Tra Vinh, Ben Tre and Vung Tau. A three-month emergency programme (food and family packs), rehabilitation and disaster preparedness are the main components of this preliminary appeal, which will be followed a full appeal when all assessments are to hand.

The Disaster

Typhoons are a rare phenomenon in southern Vietnam. In a region highly-dependent on fishing, most fishermen who received advance warning of the approaching disaster paid no heed, while thousands of small fishing boats at sea were at the mercy of this rapidly-moving weather front. Consequently, the loss of life and craft at sea has been the greatest in living memory. On land, the storm surge breached dikes across thousands of kilometres, inundating rice paddies and lifting many inland boats up onto the shore.

According to the latest available figures 435 people are dead, 833 injured and 3,669 still unaccounted for. More than 3,000 boats were sunk, some 26,000 houses destroyed, with damage
to a further 133,500 dwellings. Inundation of rice paddies covers 321,000 hectares, with crop loss put at 50%.

**The Response so far**

**Government Action**
The government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam responded quickly to this calamity, deploying its available resources to mitigate the typhoon's impact. A major search and rescue operation was underway as soon as the winds had subsided, saving an estimated 3,500 fishermen adrift in the ocean. The country's medical infrastructure has been stretched to its limits in providing emergency health care to typhoon victims. The People's Committees at every administrative level have been mobilised into gathering information and recommending the required action. The government is working closely with the UN agencies and also collaborating with those organisations which have the mandate, experience and resources to respond effectively.

**Red Cross/Red Crescent Action**
The VNRC has played a key role throughout this disaster. Branch staff and volunteers across the affected provinces participated in the 12-hour advance warning period and assisted in the evacuation of coastal communities. In the immediate aftermath, Red Cross youth groups were despatched to the shoreline to help the families of lost fishermen identify bodies recovered at sea or washed up on shore, and also burying the bodies which remained unidentified. For the poorest families left homeless, Red Cross volunteers helped with temporary shelter. In Hanoi, VNRC headquarters staff ensured urgently needed rice and medicines could be purchased and delivered to the most seriously affected.

The International Federation's Vietnam delegation head returned early from a workshop in Geneva and two delegates (disaster preparedness and information) from the Kuala Lumpur regional delegation were deployed to assist the operation.

**Coordination**
In the wake of the disaster, the government has established a disaster management coordinating group, accountable to the Central Committee on Floods and Storms (CCFS), of which VNRC is an active member. At every level, national, provincial, district and commune, there is evidence of good coordination between the authorities which provide transport for emergency supplies, on both land and on water.

**The Intended Operation**

**Assessment of Needs**
An overall needs assessment, coordinated by the CCFS, is on-going as hard information on damage and destruction continues to emerge from the affected areas. In many instances, Red Cross staff and volunteers have played an integral part in gathering information at the local level. A Red Cross team of experts is in the Mekong Delta, travelling by road and by motorised riverboat, undertaking a direct assessment of the current conditions.

**Immediate Needs**
The most immediate needs for the target population are food and basic non-food commodities including blankets, sleeping mats and mosquito nets.

**Red Cross Objectives**
Key priorities for the VNRC/International Federation are:
- To provide food supplements and basic non-food commodities to 30,000 families (150,000 people) among those worst affected by the disaster.
- To help the target families rebuild their homes and recover from the disaster through a household-based resource generating project
- To enhance the VNRC disaster response capacity through restocking 100 health posts and a comprehensive community-based disaster preparedness training component

**National Society/Federation Plan of Action**

**Overview: November 1997 - February 1998**

The Red Cross emphasis is on humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable populations in the seven provinces most affected by this typhoon, and includes basic emergency relief materials such as food, medicine, clothing, blankets, sleeping mats and mosquito nets. A rehabilitation component is envisaged through shelter provision, restocking of 100 Red Cross health posts and an innovative poultry project intended to provide needy families with a self-sustaining resource. Enhancement of the VNRC's disaster preparedness capacity at national and local level is also planned.

**Capacity of the National Society**

Although the VNRC is well-represented in almost every commune in the affected provinces, with branch offices in communities and representation on government committees, the Society has little experience in responding to a disaster on this scale. A key element of the intended programme is to strengthen the Society's institutional structure, both in community-based disaster preparedness and response and in essential reporting and communication processes.

**Present Capacity of the International Federation in Vietnam**

The International Federation has a country delegation based in the capital city, Hanoi, supported by a sub-delegation in Ho Chi Minh City. The Hanoi delegation staff includes a Head of Delegation, and a relief coordinator who has been recalled to duty for the assessment and programme implementation.

**Conclusion**

The people of the Mekong Delta are a resilient population, surviving on small garden plots, fishing and occasional day labour. The magnitude of damage and destruction wreaked by Typhoon Linda has seriously challenged their capacity for self-reliance. Working closely with the VNRC, the International Federation has designed a programme which can advance significantly the recovery process and also benefit the target population in the longer term. Donors are asked to respond rapidly and generously to this preliminary appeal. For further information and follow up, please contact Piero Calvi Parisetti, programme officer (tel no: 41.22.730.44.45).

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