PHILIPPINES: LANDSLIDE IN LEYTE ISLAND

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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 183 countries.

In Brief

A CHF 200,000 allocation from the Federation’s disaster relief emergency fund (DREF) to assist villagers in the aftermath of a devastating landslide in the Philippines has been approved by the secretariat. A preliminary emergency appeal is under preparation in response to ongoing assessments by the national society. Unearmarked funds to repay DREF are sought.

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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 Organisations (NGOs) in Disaster Relief and is committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (Sphere) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable. For longer-term programmes in this or other countries or regions, please refer to the Federation’s Annual Appeal. For support to or for further information concerning Federation programmes or operations in this or other countries, or for national society profiles, please also access the Federation’s website at http://www.ifrc.org

The Situation

A massive landslide buried hundreds of houses and a school packed with elementary students in the eastern Philippines on Friday. Initial estimates by the authorities and the Philippine National Red Cross (PNRC) officials estimated 200 people were dead and 1,500 others missing in Southern Leyte island.

Five hundred houses are feared buried in Guinsahugon village, St. Bernard town (total population 2,500), after non-stop rains for two weeks and reports of a earth tremor. An elementary school was in session when the landslide struck around 0900 local time (0100 GMT). Only three houses were left standing in the village, 670km southeast of Manila, initial reports said. Survivors were being treated at hospital.
‘It sounded like the mountain exploded, and the whole thing crumbled,’ survivor Dario Libatan told Manila radio DZMM. ‘I could not see any house standing any more.’

Sen. Richard Gordon, chairman of the Philippine Red Cross said: ‘There is no body count yet, it's our estimate.’ ‘We're mobilizing rescue operations. This area is infamous for landslides.’

The Office of Civil Defence sent two rescue helicopters and two navy ships to the remote area. Two hundred rescue workers – including volunteers from nearby provinces – are currently trying to dig out survivors. More support is arriving by the hour.

It was reported that the ground was soaked because of days of rain. Witnesses spoke of trees sliding down upright with the mud. Some analysts pointed out illegal logging in the area may have been one contributory factor to the tragedy.

In November 1991, about 6,000 people were killed on Leyte in floods and landslides triggered by a tropical storm. Last weekend, seven road construction workers died in a landslide after falling into a 46-meter (150-foot) deep ravine in the mountain town of Sogod on Leyte.

**Red Cross and Red Crescent action**

The PNRC Disaster Management Service Operations Room reported that the village has been almost wiped out by the mudslide triggered by a tremor and two weeks of rain.

PNRC chapter administrators and a response team were on site within two hours of the disaster and engaged in search and rescue as well as providing initial relief to those affected. Initial assessments were also underway.

The PNRC national headquarters is transporting 100 family tents, 300 blankets, 400 cartons of biscuits, five cartons of water purification powder and 700 body bags by cargo plane.

PNRC headquarters has mobilized disaster response teams from other provincial chapters for deployment to the stricken area to help in search and rescue as well as relief.

PNRC directors and managers were holding an emergency meeting to map out the evolving response.