

# AMERICAS : EL NIÑO 1997 - 1998

22 January  
1998

*appeal no. 27/97*

*situation report no. 1*

*period covered: 26 November 1997 - 21 January 1998*

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*The "El Niño" phenomenon is bringing erratic weather, flooding and drought to many of the Pacific coast nations of the Americas and to a lesser degree those on the Atlantic side of the continent. Despite the current very low response to the Federation's appeal, National Societies are moving to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable. If funding applications now underway succeed, the operation will be able to move closer to its main objective of anticipating "El Niño's" effects by the pre-positioning of relief supplies.*

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## *The context*

Despite differing forecasts about the evolution of the "El Niño" phenomenon and the technical difficulties of measuring its intensity and its very diverse effects, it seems likely that it will continue to affect the Americas region and particularly its Pacific coast, for several more months. In December and early January, its presence was felt in several areas of the region (see "latest events"). It also demonstrated again the capricious nature of its effects, producing heavy rain, snow storms, floods and landslides in some areas, while causing drought and forest fires in other areas, sometimes in the same country.

This "El Niño" began unusually early: it started in April 1997 in the east-central Pacific, was felt in Ecuador and Peru from June onwards, and has become an increasing threat since August. Normally it appears every year (with lower intensity) around Christmas time. The 19 December forecasts of the National Climate Prediction Center of the USA indicate that strong, warm-episode oceanic conditions, comparable to those observed during the exceptional 1982-1983 El Niño, will continue at least into the boreal spring of 1998. According to the same source, peak impacts on the global atmosphere are likely to occur in some areas of the Americas in the next six months.

## *Latest events*

### ***Bolivia:***

Severe drought occurred in the south-east and heavy rains in the north-east in December. At least 300,000 hectares were flooded in Santacruz province causing losses of about USD 20 million. The provinces of Beni and Pando were also flooded and large quantities of livestock lost. Tarija, Potosi and Cochabamba were affected by the most severe drought since 1983. The Ministry of Agriculture said damage amounted to over USD 2 million.

### ***Colombia:***

The Pacific coast, where a vulnerable population depends on subsistence fishing, has been affected by the warming of the sea water and flooding rivers. Large areas of the Andean region, particularly the provinces of Antioquia, Cundinamarca, Boyaca and Santander, have been affected by severe drought, frequently leading to forest fires ranging over thousands of hectares. This will seriously affect the crops and livestock for the first quarter of the year.

### ***Chile:***

Abnormal weather conditions -heavy rains, strong winds and floods- have created frequent emergencies, particularly in the north since June. Victims of the October earthquake, which hit the town of Chalinga, have endured severe cold in the midst of the southern hemisphere's warm season.

### ***Costa Rica:***

Territorial waters along the Pacific coast have had the highest temperature in 47 years during the last seven months. Rains were very irregular, particularly in December, a normally rainy month; when rainfall did occur it was in record amounts. The country was also affected by a cold front in December.

### ***Ecuador:***

Large coastal areas have been flooded by overflowing rivers. The worst affected provinces are Guayas, Manabi, Los Ríos, El Oro, Esmeraldas, Pichincha, Azay and Cana. 7 people died, ten people were injured, six are missing and a total of 11,201 were affected by the floods and associated landslides. Roads and houses were damaged and crops lost. In December 3,540 people had to be evacuated.

### ***Mexico:***

In December the first snow storms in 125 years affected the central region, causing over 30 deaths in traffic accidents and other emergencies. This disaster is the second attributed to El Niño. In October 1997 hurricane Pauline hit the southern part of the country (see Federation appeal 25/97)

### ***Nicaragua:***

Large sectors of the vulnerable population are at risk, particularly 3,500 families affected by a drought from May to September in the northern and central region. 750 families were assisted by the Nicaraguan RC and the Federation with USD 60,000 raised by appeal 16/97).

### ***Panama:***

Communities affected by a drought emergency in recent months continue to need support to overcome the consequences

### ***Paraguay:***

Heavy rains in early December caused flooding along the Paraguay, Parana and Neembucu rivers. The floods were worst in the provinces of Asuncion (including the metropolitan area), Neembucu (particularly the town of Alberdi) and Itaipua. The Paraguayan Red Cross reports that about 7,000 families (35,000 people), out of 13,000 families affected, were evacuated. Last week most of them remained in dire conditions while rains continued.

### ***Peru:***

According to reports from the Peruvian Red Cross, floods and mudslides in December and the first week of January affected about 7,000 families (35,000 people) in 15 departments of the

country, particularly in Tumbes, near the border with Ecuador, where the Tumbes River has overflowed. The death toll rose to at least 28, while a dozen people were missing. Almost 6,900 people are severely affected, while 539 houses, some 2,250 hectares of crops and 7,765 km. of telecommunication lines were destroyed.

The atmospheric reaction to El Niño's direct effects has also been causing weather emergencies on the Atlantic side of the continent. In **Argentina** heavy rains have affected the northern and north-eastern regions, particularly the Buenos Aires metropolitan area (2,000 people evacuated), Formosa, Santa Fe, Corrientes and Entre Rios. In several cities where evacuees had started returning to their homes more rains increased the levels of the rivers Uruguay, Paraguay and Paraná. In **Brazil**, the Brazilian Red Cross reports floods in early December in the states of Rio Grande, Santa Catarina and Parana. Six persons died, 27 were injured and 1,400 evacuated. In January, heavy rains and floods occurred in the States of Minas Gerais, Bahia, Spirito Santo and Rio de Janeiro. Storms and rains, combined with a cold wave, affected Rio de Janeiro City from 7 January onwards, causing the closure of the airport, interrupting road, ferry and train services, flooding many of the town's densely populated "favelas" and triggering landslides in Tijuca hills. In **Uruguay**, the areas most affected by rains and flooding are Artigas, Salto, Paysandú, Tacuarembó, Cerro Largo, La Valleja and Treinta y Tres. During the past couple of weeks, as many as 4,000 people had to evacuate their houses and are living in temporary shelters.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent action***

### ***Action by Operating National Societies***

All National Societies in the affected or threatened countries have been monitoring the evolution of the El Niño phenomenon and assisting the most vulnerable, albeit with very limited resources. The Colombian Red Cross, for instance, has already spent about USD 400,000 from its own cash and relief reserves to assist victims of several disasters in the last eight months attributed to El Niño. Its stocks, like those of the other ONS, are running low.

In accordance with the emergency phase (October-December) of the Appeal's Plan of Action, the National Societies of Ecuador, Paraguay and Peru have purchased emergency supplies for immediate relief action. (Funding shortages prevented any pre-positioning of supplies in these countries.) See below for further details.

### ***Action by Participating National Societies and the Federation Secretariat***

The NS of France, Germany and Spain, and the Federation Secretariat have agreed to submit co-ordinated applications to ECHO for a total of ECU 3 million for Ecuador (French RC), Nicaragua and Panama (German RC), Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Peru (Spanish RC), and a global community-awareness building programme (Federation Secretariat). These operations are for both disaster preparedness and relief over a six-month period. ECHO has stated at this stage priority is being given to the Andean countries, which are the worst affected by El Niño. It has already allocated ECU 800,000 for Bolivia and ECU 600,000 for Peru through the Spanish RC, as well as ECU 500,000 for Ecuador through the French RC.

The Federation has allocated CHF 90,000 from its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) for the Peruvian RC one-month relief operation for the 2,000 worst affected families (10,000 people) in the two most affected departments. This represents 1.8 % of operational needs. It has also released CHF 110,000 from DREF for the Paraguayan RC two-month relief operation for 1,250 families (6,250 people) in the Departments of Itapúa and Alberdi, the worst hit by the

disaster. This is 41 % of the needs for the operation. In both cases the DREF allocation is providing a provisional pre-financing of the appeal, which is still very poorly funded.

**Once the Appeal's financial situation improves, the Federation will be able to move closer to the operational objectives, which are to pre-position food, roofing, blankets and other relief items throughout the region, and assist National Societies with relief efforts, as and when needed.**

The Federation Secretariat, through its Buenos Aires and Guatemala regional delegations, is sending three regionally recruited delegates to work with the National Societies of Nicaragua, Paraguay and Peru. In Mexico, a German RC delegate is helping the Mexican RC carry out an ECHO-funded rehabilitation operation for the victims of hurricane Pauline. The French RC and the Spanish RC are also sending relief delegates to Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia.

## *Outstanding needs*

The most urgent and important outstanding need for this Appeal is for cash -- needed for both short-term preparedness (at institutional and community levels) and, depending on the evolution of El Niño, immediate relief aid to victims. Of the total CHF 13,880,000 appeal target, 78% is still uncovered.

See revised budget (annex I and II).

## *External relations*

All concerned Operating National Societies (ONS) are working closely with their Governments. The Regional Delegations of Buenos Aires and Guatemala, as part of their support for the ONS, are in contact with international organisations based in the region .

The Federation Secretariat is maintaining close contacts, at Geneva and field levels, with international agencies active in this emergency, particularly the European Union's ECHO, the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA), the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) / Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO).

## *Contributions*

See annex III.

## *Conclusion*

El Niño can be expected to continue creating serious problems for some time for most of the countries along the Pacific coast of the Americas and, by atmospheric reaction, for other Latin American countries. Several of these countries are already grappling with disasters caused by the phenomenon.

Those who have already made a donation are thanked for their support and other donors are invited to contribute to the appeal. These additional resources, preferably unearmarked, are urgently needed, in particular for countries for which no contribution has been pledged so far.

For more information, please contact the Americas Department, desk officers Luis Luna (Tel: ++41227304274, e-mail: luna@ifrc.org) or Jan Schütt (Tel: ++41227304428, e-mail: schuett@ifrc.org).

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**ANNEX I****BUDGET SUMMARY**

APPEAL No. 27/97-  
IN CHF

**SUPPLIES**

*(See detailed list in annex 2)*

Non Food supplies	6,668,000.00
Food Supplies (FOB prices)	1,932,000.00
Other Supplies (FOB prices)	2,453,000.00
<b>TOTAL SUPPLIES</b>	<b>11,053,000.00</b>

**NEEDS IN CASH****Capital equipment**

Office equipment for NS branches	300,000.00
<b>Transport, storage, insurance, custom fees, vehicle costs</b>	<b>300,000.00</b>

**Personnel**

Expatriate staff (9 Delegates x 6 months)	540,000.00
Personnel (support to NS staff/payroll)	150,000.00
Training NS Staff /Community training	350,000.00
Regional Delegation Support	270,000.00
<b>Travel &amp; communications</b>	<b>160,000.00</b>
<b>Monitoring/Evaluations</b>	<b>170,000.00</b>
<b>Information /Awareness</b>	<b>100,000.00</b>
<b>Administrative, office &amp; general expenses</b>	<b>90,000.00</b>

Secretariat operational support	397,000.00
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<b>TOTAL NEEDS IN CASH</b>	<b>2,827,000.00</b>
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<b>TOTAL APPEAL CASH &amp; KIND</b>	<b>13,880,000.00</b>
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LESS CASH ON HAND	0.00
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<b>NET REQUEST CASH &amp; KIND</b>	<b>13,880,000.00</b>
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Note: all items can be purchased locally.

In kind donations can be accepted subject to agreement with the Secretariat and National Societies on quality specification and delivery time

**ANNEX II**

**DETAILED LIST OF SUPPLIES**

**APPEAL No. 27/97-  
IN CHF**

<b><u>NON FOOD SUPPLIES</u></b>		6,668,000.00
Construction Material (including roofing material for 20,000 houses)	4,500,000.00	
Tools: Hammer, saws, nails for 20,000 houses	168,000.00	
Agricultural equipment for farmers & fishermen : seeds, fertilisers, implements for fishermen	2,000,000.00	
<b><u>FOOD SUPPLIES</u></b>		1,932,000.00
Rice: 1.200 Mt.	360,000.00	
Beans: 1.200 Mt.	540,000.00	
Maize: 1.200 Mt.	222,000.00	
Oats & Barley: 1200 Mt.	480,000.00	
Salt: 200 Mt.	42,000.00	
Oil: 319.5 Mt.	288,000.00	
<b><u>OTHER SUPPLIES</u></b>		2,453,000.00
Soap : 80,000 boxes	123,000.00	
Kitchen sets: 120,000 sets	900,000.00	
Water containers/jerrycans: 20,000 units/20 Lt.	300,000.00	
Blankets: 120,000 pieces	840,000.00	
Packing material	90,000.00	
Miscellaneous items (ropes/stretchers/footwear/clothing)	200,000.00	
<b><u>GRAND TOTAL SUPPLIES</u></b>		11,053,000.00

