

Appeal 2004



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Southeast Asia Country Summary:

Malaysia

National Context

Malaysia comprises Peninsular Malaysia and the states of Sabah, Sarawak and the Federal Territory of Labuan on the island of Borneo. Its population of 25 million represents three main ethnic groups - Malays, Chinese and Indians - as well as various indigenous groups. Economic growth from the 1970s to the 1990s was almost exclusively driven by exports - particularly of electronics - and, as a result, Malaysia was hit by the global economic downturn and the slump in the information technology (IT) sector in 2001. A substantial fiscal stimulus package mitigated the worst of the recession and the economy rebounded in 2002. The government enjoys healthy foreign exchange reserves, relatively small external debt, and aims at achieving developed-nation status by 2020.

National Society Priorities

The Malaysian Red Crescent Society (MRCS), founded in 1948, was recognised by the government in 1957, and by the Movement in 1963. It has branches in all 13 states and two federal territories of Malaysia, with a governing national executive committee broadly representative of the population.

The MRCS has fundraised considerable sums of money for international operations in recent times, including relief in North Korea. Between the 1970s and 1990s MRCS provided health and community welfare to Vietnamese boat people, with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) financing the operations.

Disaster preparedness and response: As part of the national contingency plan for disasters, the MRCS works closely with government and non-government disaster relief agencies to respond to national disasters and provide relief to victims. It has also launched community-based preparedness programmes to educate and enhance the ability of people living in disaster-prone areas to deal with disasters.

Health and Care: The MRCS initiative 'A First Aider in Every Home', seeks to achieve its goal by 2010. The society also conducts first aid courses for industrial workers, as required by the Occupational Safety and Health Act. As part of its efforts to combat AIDS, the society runs education, counselling, and public awareness programmes on HIV/AIDS. It also carries out blood donor and collection campaigns throughout the year.

Red Crescent Youth: Young people, mostly school students, constitute more than 90 per cent of the society's total membership of approximately 260,000. Members are involved in peer education on HIV/AIDS, disaster response, youth camps and exchange programmes. They also support the society's fundraising projects and dissemination of international humanitarian law. International youth exchange programmes have been carried out with Australia, Austria, Canada, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, the Philippines and Thailand.

Organisation and planning: The MRCS headquarters structure was reorganised in 2000 when certain departments and functions merged. Branches are generally self-supporting with a responsibility for fundraising, though equipment and programme support is provided from headquarters.

Red Cross Red Crescent Priorities

Both the International Federation secretariat and ICRC have developed a significant presence in Malaysia in recent years, through the establishment of regional delegations focusing on resource development and communications (ICRC) and pan-regional services (Federation).

Partnerships

The MRCS is an auxiliary to the government and works closely with a number of non-governmental organisations. It is a partner to several government ministries including the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development, which reimburses the society's ambulance service. The society collaborates with government organisations in efforts to fight AIDS.

Federation Secretariat Support

The Federation provides MRCS with training in health in emergencies, and in various aspects of disaster response. Together with the regional organisational development unit, the society conducted management and leadership development training in 2003, which is expected to continue in the future. The MRCS is part of several Federation facilitated regional networks including the Asian regional taskforce for AIDS (ART), water sanitation and first aid working groups, regional disaster management committee, and the organisational development forum. Most recently, it participated in the Red Cross Red Crescent volunteer curriculum development workshop.