

INDIA: FLASH FLOODS IN ANDHRA PRADESH

29 August 2000

Information Bulletin N° 1

The Disaster

The southern state of Andhra Pradesh suffered a record rainfall on 22-23 August 2000. The rainfall caused massive flash floods in the city of Hyderabad and twelve other districts, submerging more than 80 neighbourhoods and 350 villages. The floods have claimed the lives of more than 140 people while tens of thousands of people lost their homes. At least 190 relief camps located in community halls and other public buildings such as schools were opened in the city proper to accommodate those who had been evacuated from their houses. In the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad, an unprecedented rainfall of 24 cm, constituting more than 30% of the annual rainfall, was recorded. For the first time in the city's history, officials had to use helicopters and boats to save people from rooftops and provide the stranded population with food by air drops.

The situation is aggravated by the fact that whole neighbourhoods are situated in low-lying areas, i.e. in the waterbed of hundreds of dried up lakes. The main lake of Husseinsagar used to cover more than 1,600 hectares, but has now shrunk to 350 hectares, and the area has been used to accommodate an expanding urban population. A number of illegal constructions has spread along the sewerage and water drains. Thousands of houses situated along the water channels used to regulate the water flow from the lake of Husseinsagar to the river Musi have been washed away. While in the city most people are returning to their homes, further excessive rainfall has caused more havoc in other districts of Andhra Pradesh, leaving whole communities submerged along the main rivers. The situation remains precarious in the state as weather forecasts predict more torrential rains in the south of India.

Two members of the India floods assessment team left for Andhra Pradesh on 27 August while the three other members remained in West Bengal or Delhi. According to the team, local government and civil bodies of Andhra Pradesh have been mobilized and the situation in the twin cities seems to be now under control. City workers have distributed 6,000 kg of bleaching powder to sterilize stagnant water. Local authorities are providing rice and some cash assistance. A number of local NGOs and individuals are providing food and other relief items in neighbourhoods which were most seriously affected by the floods.

The situation in one of the most affected districts outside the city will be assessed as crops have been reported lost in the recent days and whole villages submerged or marooned. The situation remains precarious as 40 cm of rainfall was recorded in the neighbouring Maharashtra State, causing huge discharges to the Godavari river and other main river systems which run through Andhra Pradesh before reaching the Bay of Bengal.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Andhra Pradesh State Red Cross Branch mobilized its volunteers immediately and has been assisting authorities by providing bread, clean water and clothing to community relief camps accommodating the worst affected population. The State Red Cross Branch evacuated 30 boys living in an orphanage run by the Red Cross as the ground floor of the building where most of the children were sleeping, was completely flooded. The Red Cross continues to provide health care in six maternity wards run by the branch throughout the city.

Needs

As sewage systems in the city remain clogged, and in some instances breached, access to clean water is a serious concern. No outbreaks of waterborne diseases have been detected yet in the city but they may occur in the long run. Tens of thousands of people have lost their homes and are still accommodated in community shelters. Assistance will be needed in constructing temporary housing. Although food relief has been provided, additional relief may be needed as governmental and community supplies are expected to run out soon.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
Operations Funding and Reporting Department

Hiroshi Higashiura
Director
Asia Pacific Department

This and other reports on Federation operations are available on the Federation's website: <http://www.ifrc.org>