

NIGERIA: PIPELINE EXPLOSIONS

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The Disaster

On the morning of Monday 10 July, a major pipeline explosion occurred near Warri (south-eastern Nigeria), resulting in a fire which engulfed 10 kms of farmland in the vicinity of 6 villages (Overi Court, Egborode, Ajeje, Okujouogun and Okungbogbo). The explosion occurred when villagers were collecting petrol in buckets from the vandalised pipeline. The Nigerian Red Cross have now confirmed 230 deaths, with a further 30 people reported as missing. 19 casualties have been taken by Red Cross ambulance to hospitals for treatment. The majority of the casualties identified so far are women and children. The villagers affected continue to be reluctant to disclose casualties due to fear of prosecution for illegally tapping fuel. A second explosion occurred on Sunday 16 July in the Iyalla area. With assessments continuing it remains unclear how many people have been affected.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

A combined Emergency Red Cross Team made up of 35 volunteers from the Edo and Delta State Branches and under the direction of the National Emergencies Officer have been involved from the outset in a search and rescue operation, immediately providing first aid and evacuating 20 injured persons by ambulance to local hospitals.

The Emergency Team is also liaising with and providing support to the combined Health Team made up of doctors and medics from the Federal Ministry of Health, UNICEF and WHO. The Health Team are operating under the Red Cross emblem.

The Red Cross is also working with villagers to build their confidence in order to obtain access to further casualties. The team has also facilitated efforts of Government officials to communicate the message to village leaders that no prosecution will follow those casualties brought forward for treatment of their injuries.

While the Emergency Team continues the operation to treat those casualties still arriving, other team members are currently assessing the more recent Iyalla explosion. A Plan of Action has been drawn up for the delivery of food relief and facilitation of treatment of the injured.

Needs

With the continued lack of confidence in the authorities by the affected villagers, the Red Cross presence remains essential so that the medical response operation of the combined Government and UN teams can continue, allowing further casualties to be recovered. It is considered essential to continue the Red Cross efforts to provide psychological support of the villagers suffering from trauma.

The area affected by the explosion is characterised by extreme poverty, and crops of cassava, yam and palm on which the communities rely have been destroyed in the fire. 300 families have been identified as particularly affected and vulnerable, and from needs assessments carried out by the Red Cross Emergency Team it is clear that there is an urgent need for short-term food relief. Government assistance is not expected to reach the beneficiaries for some time. Costs of the operation to date have been covered from the Federation's Disaster Preparedness and Relief programme, and CHF 7,900 is required to reimburse these costs so that the planned programme activities can continue.

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