

INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

VIETNAM: FLOODS

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- This Information Bulletin is being issued based on the needs described below reflecting the information available at this time. Based on further updates and details from assessment reports, or should the situation deteriorate, the Federation will consider international support through an Appeal.

The Situation

Since August 2001 the relatively rapid increase in water levels along the Mekong river basin has led to extensive flooding both in Cambodia (see Federation Emergency Appeal 29/2001) and in the Mekong Delta provinces of Vietnam. Flood levels remained around Alarm Level 2 (dangerous flood condition) throughout much of August, but have surged over the last three weeks (15-40 cm per day). Current levels in An Giang and Dong Thap provinces are now well in excess of flood Alarm Level 3 (emergency flood condition), with general widespread and uncontrollable flooding, dyke failure and severe damage to infrastructure.

Flood levels at key stations in An Giang, Dong Thap and Long An provinces were between 0.53 metres and 0.90 metres above Alarm Level 3 as of 07:00 on 18 September. The UNDP/MARD Disaster Management Unit has forecast that flood waters will increase rapidly over the coming week as rising water levels upstream combine with high tides in the South China Sea to trap flood waters in the Mekong Delta.

Flood waters have inundated An Giang, Dong Thap and Long An provinces and are rapidly spreading throughout Tien Giang, Kien Giang and Can Tho provinces. The rising waters are currently affecting 318 communes across 32 districts, and some flood warning stations have already recorded flood levels in excess of the peaks reached during the catastrophic 2000 floods which are widely regarded as the worst in 60 years.

While the floods have come unusually late in the season, enabling people to harvest 94-100% of the rice crop, the rapid onset of the floods has caught many people ill prepared for evacuation. According to UNDP/MARD figures (17/09/01) approximately 126,559 households have been inundated with flood waters and approximately 88,760 households are in need of emergency assistance. The latest UNDP reports show that the floods have already claimed the lives of 109 people (95 of whom are children). This figure is high when compared to the same time last year and evidence suggests that many of the fatalities

have been among the new residents of the Delta who are unfamiliar with the floods. Additionally an estimated 192,788 children have been unable to attend school due to the floods.

There has also been severe damage to agricultural land, including the loss of crops and livestock, some housing has been destroyed or damaged and many schools and health centres have been damaged and remain closed. The total economic loss to date is estimated at 121,870 million VND (8.1 million USD) across the 6 provinces.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Following the floods in 2000, which occurred in many of the same provinces as the current disaster, the Federation and Vietnamese Red Cross (VNRC) have, through 2000 and early 2001, worked to provide immediate relief assistance to the affected people as well as on a programme of longer term rehabilitation. While the impact of the relief assistance was immediate, the impact of the rehabilitation has been directly felt during the 2001 floods; a total of 3,000 steel frame homes have provided thousands of individuals with a means to escape from this year's rising waters. Benefits from the rehabilitation phase of the 2000 operation have also been felt by the VNRC; communications have been enhanced, mobile medical units have been able to respond and skills taught to volunteers have been put into practice.

Meanwhile, the VNRC has, since early August, been monitoring the current floods and has provided initial relief assistance from its own disaster stocks. Chapters of the VNRC in the affected provinces have been working with the People's Committee's to distribute emergency assistance to households where a family member has died, where the house has collapsed or where the household have had to be evacuated. The VNRC has provided an initial amount of 40,000,000 VND (2,666 USD) for the procurement of relief items for An Giang, Dong Thap and Long An provinces.

The VNRC has mobilized its staff and volunteers at all levels to respond to the disaster and help the affected people. Shock brigade members and volunteers are assisting families to evacuate to safe areas and vulnerable people in the worst affected areas are receiving support with food (rice and instant noodles), shelter (plastic sheeting) and basic medicines.

The number of deaths of children is a particular concern to both the Red Cross and Government of Vietnam. The VNRC and Ministry of Education and Training are already cooperating to raise awareness of the problem and to help reduce the number of deaths by drowning of unsupervised children. A programme is underway to train 2,250 teachers in disaster response and preparedness, targeting approximately 101,250 children. A brochure is also being produced for distribution in conjunction with UNICEF to assist in informing parents of measures to protect their children, particularly during times of floods.

The VNRC completed a flood assessment mission in the Mekong Delta over the period 4-11 September with support from the Federation and French Red Cross. A joint VNRC and Federation Situation Briefing, which was attended by representatives of the international donor community, NGOs and media agencies, was held in Hanoi on 14 September. During the briefing the UNDP/MARD Disaster Management Unit made a comprehensive presentation of their systems and the latest flood data. The VNRC used the Situation Briefing as an opportunity to highlight the current situation appealing to local donors to support its flood relief operation.

The VNRC has received contributions from the Spanish Red Cross (10,896 USD) and from the Government of Belarus (10,000 USD) for the flood relief operation. It is likely that the need for additional resources will increase in coming weeks and that a full National Appeal will be launched. The Federation is working to support the flood assessment and relief efforts of the VNRC and will launch an International Appeal if and when the situation demands.

Copies of the VNRC needs assessment are available from the VNRC or through the Federation delegation

For a full description of the National Society profile, see www.ifrc.org

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All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.

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