

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

COSTA RICA, HONDURAS, NICARAGUA: FLOODS

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Disaster relief emergency fund (DREF) Allocated: CHF 50,000

- ***This Information Bulletin is being issued based on the needs described below. A DREF allocation of CHF 50,000 has been released, and the Federation does not anticipate further needs. Unearmarked funds to repay DREF are needed. This operation will be reported on through the quarterly DREF update. On-line donations can be made at: www.ifrc.org.***

The Situation

A tropical depression over Central America at the end of October and early November resulted in heavy rainfall and severe flood damage in areas already affected by drought earlier in the year. The depression seriously affected Honduras (see information bulletin issued on 2 November), Costa Rica and Nicaragua. A tropical storm gradually developed to hurricane 4 force, taking the name of hurricane Michelle as it continued towards Jamaica and Cuba.

Costa Rica w

On 19 October, the Costa Rican Red Cross issued a green alert in its branches along the country's southern coast because of heavy rainfall caused by the depression/tropical storm. The government declared a state of emergency on the northern, central and southern Pacific coast and, as of 31 October, the National Society began to assist in the evacuation of populations in danger from potential flooding, as rain continued. The effects of the storm were felt throughout most of the country. However, the most affected regions were the Provinces of Guanacaste and Puntarenas where the districts of Cartagena, Sardinal, Filadelfia, Santa Cruz, Nandayure, Nosara, Parrita, San Blas, Moravia, El Coto, Río Arío, Lepanto, Ciudad Neily, Palmar Norte and Ciudad Cortes experienced flooding and mudslides as major rivers burst their banks. A total of 73 towns and villages were affected as 38 rivers and tributaries swelled and overflowed. Thirty-one shelters were set up to accommodate 1,437 people who were evacuated from their homes.

Honduras w

On Sunday, 28 October, the formation of a tropical depression travelling across the Atlantic Coast towards the Gulf of Honduras, resulted in heavy rainfall throughout the country. On 30 October, the national Permanent Contingency Commission (COPECO) declared a red alert in view of the imminent rise of the level of rivers, particularly the Chamelecón in the department of Cortés and the Aguán and El Lean in the departments of Atlántida, Colón and Yoro. COPECO urged the population in low-lying areas near river beds to take appropriate preventive measures. An emergency situation was declared in five departments. As the tropical depression gained strength, intense rainfall resulted in flooding, particularly affecting the towns of La Lima and La Ceiba. A total of 25,270 people were evacuated from high-risk areas.

As of 5 November, COPECO reports that in the departments of Colón, Atlántida, Yoro, Cortés and Gracias a Dios, seven people died, 14 disappeared and 25,397 people were affected by the floods. In addition, 1,211 houses were damaged, 72 were destroyed, 13 roads were damaged and 32 bridges destroyed. Furthermore, thousands of hectares of crops were washed away.

Nicaragua w

The tropical depression caused flooding on Nicaragua's Caribbean coast as torrential rain cut off the main port on the coast, Puerto Cabezas. Rains also affected the Waspán and Río Coco area and the zone of Rosita on the Río Bambana and Río Kukalaya. Thousands of hectares of land were engulfed with the subsequent loss of animals and crops. It is estimated that some 100,000 people were affected in these three areas as flooding occurred in 61 communities of the Autonomous Region of the North Atlantic (RAAN). The area had been lashed by heavy rains as of 25 October, as a result of which the ground was saturated, thereby increasing the impact of the flooding. The rains stopped on 2 November as the tropical depression gathered force, developing into a category four hurricane. 5,636 people were evacuated from low-lying areas near to river beds.

In its report of 4 November, the Civil Defence said that five people had died and that an initial evaluation of damage indicated that 80 per cent of the crops in the region had been damaged.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Costa Rica w

On 2 November, a yellow alert was in force in Red Cross branches in the affected areas, in order to ensure that additional human and material resources were available to respond in the event of an emergency. Red Cross teams worked together with the National Emergency Committee in rescue and evacuation initiatives, providing trained personnel and resources. In the Guanacaste region, Red Cross teams undertook six rescue operations, saving 30 people from fast-flowing rivers. In Guanacaste and along the southern coast, the Costa Rican Red Cross helped to evacuate 800 people from low-lying land in cooperation with the local authorities. In Santa Cruz, 400 people were evacuated and 50 people were rescued from flood waters; 13 temporary shelters were established in this area. The Costa Rican Red Cross continues to work with the National Emergency Committee to ensure care for those housed in temporary shelters.

A damage and needs assessment was conducted by the National Society, whereby the area of Nandayure was identified as the worst affected and where 468 houses were partially damaged.

Honduras w

On the night of 28 October, evacuations took place in San Manuel, Cortés, and in the city of El Progreso in Yoro. Red Cross branches in La Ceiba, La Lima, La Esperanza and Potrerillos immediately mobilized 76 volunteers under the supervision of six trained national intervention team (NIT) members. The volunteers assisted with evacuation of families at risk: 1,558 families in La Lima, 300 families in La Ceiba and a further 85 families in Potrerillos. Representatives of Red Cross branches worked in coordination with the municipal emergency committees to assist those evacuated. As the organization responsible for distributing humanitarian aid provided by

the government, the Honduran Red Cross gave out 1,000 food rations and plastic sheeting; in addition, 200 blankets and 200 jerry cans provided by the National Society were distributed.

In addition to evaluations carried out in Colón, Cortés, Yoro and Atlántida, an assessment team made up of members of the Honduran Red Cross and the Spanish Red Cross carried out field assessments between 2 and 4 November in Mosquitia (otherwise known as the department of Gracias a Dios), on the border with Nicaragua, an isolated region which is difficult to access. The ethnic population of subsistence farmers and fishermen that lives on river banks is severely affected. The team evaluated that, as a priority, a total of 4,075 families in three different areas are in urgent need of assistance as they have lost all possessions, livestock and crops and are without clean drinking water. There are also concerns relating to the spread of water-borne disease.

Nicaragua w

Representatives of the American Red Cross undertook to carry out evaluations in the region of Waspán, where the National Society has been working for several years and which is represented by a “unit” of the Nicaraguan Red Cross. Members of the Nicaraguan Red Cross conducted an evaluation in Puerto Cabezas, and the Federation’s regional health delegate and his assistant, carried out an evaluation in Siuna and Rosita between 2 and 5 November. This took place under difficult conditions given the state of roads in the area, the lack of transportation, resources and communications. In addition, vast areas had been submerged by swollen river waters. Thirty-four communities were found to have been affected with a total of between 1,200 and 1,900 families, or some 10,000 to 12,000 people, left destitute.

Needs

Costa Rica w

On 2 November, the Costa Rican Red Cross launched a national appeal for assistance to those who had taken refuge in shelters in Guanacaste and in the southern coastal areas. As a priority, it is planned to implement a single round of food distributions for 100 vulnerable families and beneficiary surveys are currently taking place.

As for the longer-term, a total of 20 aqueducts were destroyed by the floods and there is a need for reconstruction/repair to ensure potable water supplies. Agricultural support is also seen as a crucial need which may be addressed through the provision of tools and seeds to farmers who lost their livelihoods during the floods, together with training of communities in improved agricultural techniques. Fishing communities could also be assisted through provision of fishing equipment and training in their use.

The Red Cross branch in Parrita, situated close to the river, has incurred structural damage and it is necessary to construct a branch office in an appropriate location which is not at risk of flooding. As the Filadelfia branch is strategically placed, a centre for emergency operations is currently being established; further funding for equipment is required in order to complete installations.

Given that flood disasters occur each year in these areas, endangering the lives of hundreds of people, the Costa Rican Red Cross seeks to create emergency response teams which will have resources such as a motor boat and other equipment for rescue operations.

A further concern is the need to improve telecommunications equipment with a view to improving capacity in search, evacuation and rescue operations of this nature.

Honduras w

Following assessments of needs, the Honduran Red Cross aims to assist 2,450 families who lost their homes and possessions with the provision of food rations, a kitchen set, two blankets, a family hygiene kit and jerry cans, as follows:

Colón: 450 families in Bonito Oriental and Tocoa.

Cortés: 832 families in La Lima - 583; Puerto Cortés - 130; Choloma 57; Omoa 12; Potrerillos 50

Yoro: 68 families in El Progreso

Atlántida: 100 families in La Ceiba.

Mosquitia/Gracias a Dios: 1,000 families

In addition, dengue fever awareness campaigns will be carried out through 11 Red Cross branches and it is planned to distribute 22,000 information brochures which have been compiled by the Ministry of Health and UNICEF. Evaluations also ascertained the need for psychological support in the affected areas and Honduran Red Cross teams will provide training within communities in order to help those in distress to overcome the trauma of losing their livelihoods.

Nicaragua w

The local emergency committee in Rosita fears food shortages in the short term. Contaminated water sources pose a problem since the local population drinks river water and latrines have collapsed into the flood waters.

Immediate needs, as ascertained by the evaluation team, are for food, medical assistance, blankets, hygiene kits and plastic sheeting for some 1,900 vulnerable families.

Coordination

The Costa Rican Red Cross undertook coordination with the national meteorological institute, with the Presidents of the local emergency committees, the National Emergency Commission and the national health authorities.

In Honduras, an overall plan of action is being drawn up in order to ensure a coherent, coordinated approach to the provision of assistance to disaster victims. The Honduran Red Cross is working in close collaboration with both the American Red Cross and the German Red Cross which have committed funds to the planned operation. However, an outstanding balance of funding needs for the operation remains.

The Nicaraguan Red Cross is ensuring coordination with the American Red Cross which has been working for many years in the area of Waspán, and with the Spanish Red Cross. A joint plan of action is being drawn up to ensure maximum use of resources and to avoid duplication of effort.

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

For further details please contact :

- *Olaug Bergseth, Desk Officer for Central America, Phone 41 22 730 45 35; Fax 41 22 733 0395; email: bergseth@ifrc.org*

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.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Head, a.i.
Relationship Management Department

Santiago Gil
Head
Americas Department