

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

GABON AND THE REPUBLIC OF CONGO: EBOLA OUTBREAK

14 December 2001

Information Bulletin N° 1

Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) Allocated: CHF 50,000

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 assessments, or should the situation deteriorate, the Federation will consider a request for further support to the national societies through an international appeal. Unearmarked funds are needed to replenish the DREF.

The Disaster

Gabon is situated in the equatorial forest zone where the Ebola virus is prevalent. The first outbreak was reported in 1994, the second in February and March 1996, and the last in 1999 in the sparsely populated Department of Booué (see map).

Separate reports also indicate that the Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo are affected by the Ebola outbreak, but detailed information is not yet available from these areas.

Recent events

Since the beginning of November, 2001 the inhabitants of the region of l'Ogooué-Ivindo (in the Department of Zadié) and the locality of Mékambo reported an increased number of dead monkeys together with an increased number of persons suffering from fever and vomiting, bloody diarrhoea, and general pain.

In one family ten persons fell ill and all died. One local health care worker also died in a similar way. The exact number of victims is not currently available.



Government Action

Since the government became aware of the situation a team composed of a biologist, a military doctor, an epidemiologist, a local health expert from the WHO, and a medical researcher was assigned to the affected area. According to the preliminary results, the mission confirmed indications of a viral hemorrhagic fever. A commission led by the Government's director general of health was immediately set up to coordinate a co-ordinated and effective response. The cabinet from the Ministry of Defence contacted the regional delegation for support to respond to the epidemic. The Government has also now made an official request for international assistance.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The Red Cross of Gabon (RCG) is a relatively young national society with a network of volunteers currently under formation. The national society proved itself during the last Ebola epidemic in 1999, and during the last mass influx of Congolese refugees in 1999. In Libreville the RCG is active in supporting the ambulatory treatment centre for people living with HIV/AIDS (with the assistance of the French Red Cross). The local red Cross branch in Mokakou has requested assistance from the RCG headquarters as well as the regional delegation to develop a plan of action to mount an operation against the outbreak, working in collaboration with the Minister of Health.

The regional delegation has sent a team composed of a medical assistant and information delegate to assist with the operation. This team will assist the national society to disseminate public information, assess volunteer training, and provide material to protect volunteers (gloves and masks). The following supplies have already been provided:

- 50 disposable smocks.
- 50 pairs of boots.
- 100 anti-dust masks.
- 150 nose masks.
- 100 pairs of plastic gloves.
- 100 disposable gloves.
- 200 litres de gasoline.

In response to the last Ebola outbreak, 50 volunteers were trained (30 in Libreville and 20 in the Booué locality, situated 400 kilometres from Mékambo). In Congo-Brazzaville similar sensibilization activities will be carried out in the province of Sangha.

The following detailed action will be undertaken in Gabon and Congo-Brazzaville:

- sensibilization: In Gabon, 100 volunteers will be mobilized, 25 in Mokakou, 30 in Mékambo, and 15 in Booué pour le Gabon; in Congo-Brazzaville, 30 in the province of Sangha. The training will focus on: proper protection for people working in the affected zones, and the effective dissemination of accurate public information, and the distribution of supplies. After the training, the volunteers will be divided into three-person teams, travelling from village to village and house to house to cover the maximum number of persons. This activity will also serve as a means of monitoring familles to confirm any obvious cases of Ebola.
- epidemiological surveillance: the affected population lives in isolated villages and areas accessible primarily by bicycle. Volunteers will visit villages every three days to record or monitor any clinical signs of Ebola. In case of positive indications of Ebola, all necessary precautions are carried out with the health and government authorities. Every volunteer which participates in this action will be the subject of special medical observations for three weeks following the end of the operation.
- Coordination: a doctor/consultant will be made available to the RCG to assist in implementing the plan of action and to coordinate actions with the Minister of Health and WHO.

Needs

In addition to the supplies already distributed (specified above) the following is needed:

- 100 disposable smocks.
- 150 pairs of boots.
- 500 disposable nose masks.

- 300 pairs of plastic gloves.
- 1,000 disposable gloves.
- 200 litres de gasoline.
- 45 kgs of chlorine.

On 17 December, two specialists from the Federation will arrive in Libreville to assess the situation in Gabon, Congo Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo, which will form the basis of a probable Federation emergency appeal.

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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