

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

IRAN: DROUGHT

11 July 2001

Information Bulletin N° 01/01

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

For the fourth consecutive year, Iran is facing a severe drought, which has expanded this year to 10 out of the 28 provinces of the country, affecting some 25 million people. The country's water reserves are down 45 per cent this year, according to the Iranian Ministry of Interior. Average rainfalls are below 25 per cent of the usual amount. The most affected provinces include Fars, Keran, Khorasan and Sistan-va-Baluchistan. Furthermore, Afghan refugees continue to arrive in those provinces, located in the eastern part of the country, due to the situation in Afghanistan, including the severe drought also affecting Iran.

Since mid-June the provinces of Bushehr and Sistan-va-Baluchistan and the cities of Mashhad and Hamedan have been rationing water, and the capital, Tehran, is expected to start rationing water too by mid-July. The government fears an exodus from villages to towns, in search of water distribution, which would aggravate the crisis and cut people from their already poor sources of income.

The Iranian Government has allocated USD 500 million this year in an effort to combat drought effects, of which a major part should be dedicated for the construction of water pipelines. However, the practical effects of this major structural initiative will require many months to be felt. In an unprecedented gesture, the Iranian authorities are appealing for international assistance.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Since August 2000, the Red Crescent Society of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRCS), has been implementing a project to assist drought victims, in particular Afghan refugees, in the province of Sistan-va-Baluchistan. In the towns of Zabul and Zahedan, as well as in the surrounding settlements, water is presently being distributed to 20,000 families, with the support of the International Federation and funding from donor national societies, governments and the European Community Humanitarian Office.

In reaction to the reported worsening situation, which is equally affecting both the local Iranian population and refugees from Afghanistan, the Federation carried out a field assessment, from 22 June to 2 July, with the collaboration of the IRCS. The aim was to assess the needs and the possibilities to extend the ongoing programme to the provinces most affected this year. Together with IRCS, the Federation's Secretariat is currently exploring the grounds and appropriateness for an international appeal, the priority areas for assistance, and the funding requirements. Meetings were held in Tehran and the affected provinces with IRCS, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Medecins Sans Frontiers, BAFIA (Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigration Affairs), governmental water supply authorities, Afghan families and schools, UNICEF, UN Population Fund and state educational authorities.

The main findings of the assessment concern the following areas:

- Provinces visited - Khorasan and Sistan-va-Baluchistan; the only drinking water in southern Khorasan (about the same size as Great Britain or Ghana), is being delivered by 91 tankers to 97,000 families in over 600 villages. The only life support was based on animals, mainly sheep and camels with a little agriculture. The animals are dying from lack of food and water and there was little to no agricultural production this year. Sistan-va-Baluchistan to the south of Khorasan was in a worse condition with a large lake dried up as well as the rivers, springs and wells. Nut and fruit trees - some up to 250 years old - were dying. The recovery period from this drought will be long.
- The overriding message was that the effects of the drought were being felt by all people, Afghans and Iranians alike. The needs are still crucial for the Afghan refugees but the drought which has now entered its fourth year is affecting all in the region. The ongoing Federation/IRCS water project in and around Zahedan and Zabol supplies, in some cases, the only drinking water available to 20,000 families. Given the prospect of a new assistance programme the following groups have been identified as the most vulnerable: the disabled, women-headed households and large families.
- There is clearly not enough water in many places for proper sanitation and personal hygiene purposes. Latrines are used in most villages, however in towns with fixed sewage systems, the problem of waste disposal will become more difficult in the future. The IRCS is already distributing a hygiene parcel containing nine items and a monthly distribution of soap in Khorasan province. Extending this policy to other provinces could be very useful. Polio, which was completely eradicated from Iran, has returned and some cholera cases were confirmed by the UN Development Programme in Kerman province. Tuberculosis cases are increasing among the Afghan refugees. Diphtheria and typhoid are also considered to be problems in some areas due to the low vaccination coverage in Afghanistan.

Following the field assessment and intensive contacts with central and local authorities in Iran, international and national humanitarian organizations, the Federation and IRCS started consultations on the appropriateness of appealing to the international community on behalf of the drought victims in the eastern provinces of Iran. These consultations concluded that any eventual humanitarian assistance programme for drought victims in Iran should focus on extending the provision of drinking water (as in the ongoing project in Sistan-va-Baluchistan) to other severely affected provinces such as Khorasan, in particular.

According to the defined criteria for assistance (most vulnerable groups), and on the basis of the planned proposal, IRCS would provide water and other services (food and hygiene kits) to 40,000 families (200,000 persons), in addition to ongoing assistance.

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 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 web site at <http://www.ifrc.org>

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

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