

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

SOUTHEAST ASIA: MEKONG FLOODS 2001

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This Information Bulletin is for information only. The Federation is not seeking any funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time. However, the situation is being monitored and if flooding worsens, the Federation will consider launching an Emergency Appeal.

The Situation

Up to 150 people have died and more than 530,000 people have been affected by floods in the Mekong River Basin region. The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent is on alert in Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

Millions of dollars of damage has been caused in northern and northeastern Thailand. In Cambodia hundreds of thousands of people have been evacuated. In Vietnam the government is reportedly preparing mass evacuations with 1,000 homes and thousands of hectares of crops already under water in An Giang province. Several communities in Lao PDR have been evacuated to higher ground, especially in four southern provinces. More rainfall is expected over the next few days with south-westerly monsoon winds prevailing.

The situation is currently mixed and the Mekong River Commission has recorded the following:

1. Laos down to Pakse: GREEN (no warning), no flooding, present peak reached, water receding, no major problem forecast for the next week.
2. Pakse/Laos down to Kompong Cham/Cambodia: YELLOW (warning). The worst affected area, but water is receding after a peak last week. Relief operations underway.
3. Phnom Penh and downstream to Prek Kdam: GREEN (no warning/flooding), but water levels gradually rising.
4. Vietnam Tan Chau and Chau Doc: RED (flooding stage), water still rising. Situation being monitored

In some instances, water levels are higher than at the same time last year when there was major flooding. In 2000, waters began to rise rapidly along the entire basin, peaking between 10 and 25 September at the northern and

southern extremes of the river. Given that rain is forecast, a high alert will be maintained, particularly in Cambodia and Vietnam.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The International Federation's Regional Office in Bangkok, the Federation's delegations in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam, and the National Societies in the region are monitoring the situation in coordination with the inter-governmental Mekong River Commission and other governmental and non-governmental agencies.

Thailand: The Thai Red Cross Society (TRCS) has been active in the worst affected areas in Petchabun and Udon Thani provinces, distributing relief supplies and medicines to more than 5,000 families. Two TRCS relief teams of nurses, doctors and volunteers have been involved, along with local volunteers, the Thai Army and government workers. They used high-wheel army trucks and flat-bottom boats for transport. Large tracts of land were submerged and in Udon Thani (the provincial capital) water levels rose as high as 3.5 metres.

Lao PDR: The situation is being closely watched by the Lao Red Cross, supported by the International Federation. The government, the National Disaster Management Office, Ministry of Agriculture and World Food Programme are also on alert. Lao Red Cross disaster preparedness personnel and the Netherlands Red Cross representative are assessing the southern provinces. The Federation/Lao Red Cross disaster preparedness programme has been implemented throughout 2001. Emergency stocks and equipment have been prepositioned, disaster management personnel and warehouse staff trained and emergency rice stocks procured.

Viet Nam: The Red Cross of Viet Nam (RCVN) teams in the Mekong Delta 'danger zone' are keeping watch, as are government agencies. The RCVN and the Federation are setting up a working group to monitor the situation. An estimated 20,000 household kits (two blankets, one mosquito net, one kitchen set, and one bucket) are on standby. The RCVN and the Federation's delegation in Vietnam have extensive experience in handling flood-related disasters.

Cambodia: The Cambodian Red Cross Society (CRCS) estimates that floods have affected more than 100,000 people in three provinces. An estimated 23,000 people have been evacuated to higher ground in two provinces. Most evacuees have been moved to safe areas designated and prepared by the CRCS and the Ministry of Rural Development during rehabilitation after last year's floods. Forty-four safe areas were prepared in eight provinces, each with a well and latrines. CRCS volunteers and Federation delegates and staff are participating in assessments in affected provinces. Six thousand emergency household kits are being procured by the Belgian Red Cross and CRCS, along with 6,000 sets of additional relief items (plastic sheets, mosquito nets, sleeping mats and water canisters). A first relief distribution of rice, clothing, sleeping mats and shelter material will take place in Kampong Cham today (27 August) to 1,500 families. The Federation and the CRCS are coordinating with the government, National Disaster Management Committee and NGOs.

Latest reports say that eight provinces are affected and the CRCS had their first distribution for 2,000 families (10,000 people).

Latest government figures indicate the following:

- 386,093 people (85,975 families) affected
- 246,928 people (40,190 families) evacuated
- 17 persons dead
- 186 houses destroyed
- 32 km of national road damaged
- 88 km secondary road damaged
- 14 bridges damaged
- 14 culvert destroyed
- 133 school damaged
- 15 health centres damaged
- 74 irrigation schemes damaged

- 157,809 ha rice field affected
- 56,327 ha rice destroyed
- 2,200 ha seedlings destroyed
- several livestock dead

Experience of the Mekong Floods in 2000: These floods affected almost nine million people and killed 800. Damage was estimated to be more than USD 455 million. The International Federation and the National Societies appealed for, and raised, more than USD 9 million. Funds were used for the emergency and rehabilitation phase of the operation to assist 700,000 people. An evaluation of the Red Cross/Red Crescent operations - conducted by the International Federation in cooperation with the International Institute for Disaster Risk Management in Manila - in 2001 pinpointed lessons. One positive finding was the impact of Red Cross/Red Crescent disaster prevention and mitigation work throughout the sub-region. It was also found that community-based prevention measures have reduced the loss of life and property.

Needs

If the situation worsens, the International Federation will launch an Emergency Appeal to provide relief items, including shelter material, food, mosquito nets and water purification tablets.

For a full description of National Society profiles, see <http://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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