

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

PACIFIC: AFGHAN ASYLUM SEEKERS

5 September 2001

Information Bulletin N° 01/01

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.

The Situation

Some 460 asylum seekers, mostly Afghans, were rescued by the Tampa, a Norwegian freighter, on 26 August after an Indonesian-registered boat nearly sank while sailing from Indonesia to Christmas Island. The Australian government denied the asylum seekers permission to land on Christmas Island. The asylum seekers were subsequently transferred to an Australian navy vessel, the HMAS Manoora, and are currently en route from the offshore area of the Australian territory of Christmas Island (northeast of Australia) to Papua New Guinea. Upon arrival in Papua New Guinea the group will be split into two: 150 women and children and 283 men, and flown to New Zealand and the Republic of Nauru where their status will be determined by the appropriate UN bodies.

The Australian Red Cross has made several offers of assistance to the Australian authorities. An Australian Red Cross assessment team which landed on Christmas Island last week was not given access to the asylum seekers on board the Tampa and have now returned to the mainland. Representatives of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), were allowed aboard the HMAS Manoora as the asylum seekers were transferred from the Tampa and will accompany the group to the respective destinations (New Zealand and Nauru). The Australian Government has pledged its full support, financial and other, to the Nauru government in processing the asylum seekers. The journey to PNG is expected to take 6-10 days, so the HMAS Manoora is not expected to arrive in PNG until early next week.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Federation's Regional Delegation for the Pacific in Suva, Fiji, has been closely monitoring the situation and continues to liaise with all involved Red Cross and Red Crescent partners and external regional entities such as UNHCR, IOM, the media, and others. Should the Red Cross become more involved in this issue, the Regional Delegation in Suva would provide the lead as there is no National Society on Nauru. In New Zealand, the national society is routinely involved in the reception of refugees and asylum seekers, working closely with the Refugee and Migrant Commission who are the major agency involved in the resettlement process in the country.

The Pacific Regional Health Delegate arrived in Nauru Monday to carry out a preliminary assessment to determine infrastructure conditions, outstanding needs and the Federation's potential role. The initial findings seem to indicate

that Nauru (population 11,000, total land area 21 km sq) will face several challenges upon the arrival of the 283 males from the group. It is expected that the group will remain in Nauru for at least 3-4 months before a decision is taken on next steps. The infrastructure in Nauru appears to be somewhat limited, with transport constraints and electricity scarce (diesel-powered generator). The Health Delegate has made contact with the Nauru government and the Australian Department of Defence representatives and IOM representatives who have arrived in the country.

It is not known whether the International Federation's offer of assistance will be accepted by the Nauru government and/or the UN agencies that will eventually screen the asylum seekers and determine their status. The UNHCR (Regional Office in Canberra, Australia) has now received a formal request from the government of Nauru to take part in determining the status of the group.

The Red Cross Societies of Australia and New Zealand are on standby to make human and material resources available to the International Federation if and when necessary. The Norwegian Red Cross have offered a medical team and are on standby. The Asia-Pacific Information Unit is on standby in Bangkok/Singapore and will provide media and information support as needed.

For further details please contact:

- *Martha Keays, Head of Regional Delegation, Suva; Phone +679 311-855; Fax +679 311-406; email ifrcfj01@ifrc.org*
- *Geneva: Satoshi Sugai, Phone +41-22 730-4222; Fax 41 22 733 0395; email sugai@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

Hiroshi Higashiura
Head
Asia-Pacific Department