

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

PAPUA NEW GUINEA: VOLCANIC ERUPTION

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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.

The eruption of Mt. Pago Volcano, East New Britain, Papua New Guinea, early on 5 August caused serious environmental damage to areas up to 20 km away, particularly in the western and north. Ashes and acid rains have poisoned crops, fruits and vegetables leaving people with no basic food supply. According to the report by Rabaul Volcanological Observatory (RVO), the eruption is not violent, but constant emission of thick, white fume confirms that it is ongoing. Lava flow continues from the Northwestern end of the fissure system and is running in two directions: Northwest and South. Volcanic earthquakes are being recorded as well as some deformation of landscapes. Two groups of volcanic



Mt. Pago Volcano

experts have assessed the eruption, one team from USA and the other from Japan. A substantial amount of surveillance equipment has been dispatched to monitor changes. Mt. Pago and 14 other volcanos on the island of New Britain are considered potentially dangerous. Experts are not excluding the possibility of a major eruption, but it is most likely that quiet eruptions will continue for years at the present level. This could mean that a number of villages and a lot of arable land nearby is lost for many years.

Some 18,000 people from the danger zone have been evacuated into nine camp settlements around the provincial capital of Kimbe. The provincial Government has considered further evacuation to new permanent settlements elsewhere. Land has been allocated and agreements made with authorities, but no final decision has been made yet.

In the meantime people in temporary camps are suffering hardship. The rainy season has started and accommodation is overcrowded (three families in one tent). There is inadequate and unsafe water supply as well as little food.

The camp management is the responsibility of the Provincial Government, but it cannot do much until the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) declares an emergency.



Camp settlement in Kimbe

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

As a member of the Mt. Pago taskforce, the Papua New Guinea Red Cross Society (PNGRCS) and the Federation delegation is in close contact with the NDMO and the people on the ground. Two early assessments have been carried out resulting in two rounds of relief distributions. PNGRCS maintains relief containers in a number of branches, and East

New Britain Branch (Rabaul) released two containers consisting of mainly tarpaulins, mosquito nets and blankets. PNGRCS distributed sport equipment to all the camps, a contribution from the National Youth programme. Many of the youngsters are suffering from boredom. The national youth officer took the opportunity to disseminate Red Cross knowledge in each camp.

At a meeting in NDMO it was agreed that the Director General of NDMO would approach the Provincial Governor to request the Red Cross officially to 1) reassess the humanitarian situation in the camps and 2) to draft a plan for improvements and 3) to be responsible for its implementation. PNGRCS together with the Federation Delegation are looking forward to this request and is ready to act accordingly.

Government Action

Provincial Administration response:

Through the National Disaster Management Office, the Provincial Administration has provided food to the camps for 1 million Kina (roughly valued at CHF 330,000). Administrative officers have been deployed for camp management and logistics support.

National Government response:

National Government paid 1 million Kina for food, facilitated assessment missions and coordination meetings through NDMO in Port Moresby. Recognizing the PNGRCS as one of the key players in this operation, they expect strong support from Red Cross for our future involvement.

Other agencies' Action

Representatives from AusAid have been very active from the very beginning of this operation. They covered most of the assessment costs and pledged support to activities that would improve living conditions of people in the camps. NGOs such as Caritas and Salvation Army have also been active in providing relief supplies to some of the camps.

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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