

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

Democratic Republic of the Congo: Eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano in Goma

17 January, 2002

Information Bulletin N° 01

DREF Allocated: CHF 100,000

This Bulletin is intended for information only. A Federation Field Assessment and Coordination Team (FACT) currently in place in the DRC is assessing the situation. Based on further updates and details or should the situation deteriorate the Federation will consider international support through an Appeal.

The Disaster

Nyiragongo, a potentially dangerous volcano that looms a few miles from the major eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) town of Goma erupted at approximately 09:30 local time on 17 January, 2002. This volcano was a well known source of concern during the first year of the Rwanda refugee exodus when predictions of an imminent eruption caused agencies to undertake contingency planning to protect or relocate hundreds of thousands of refugees camped on the volcano's slopes. The lava flow is reportedly descending in three tracks, one towards the town's airport and another cutting off the main road north to Uganda. A "Red Alert" has been issued and an evacuation of the estimated 300,000 population including UN staff has already started, according to local authorities.

The 1977 eruption of Nyiragongo caused hundreds of fatalities and injuries and massive damage. No details are currently available on current casualties or damage, but initial reports from the area indicate some degree of population movement has already started towards the nearby Rwanda border crossing at Gisenyi, and it appears for now these crossings are being permitted by the Rwanda Government.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

CHF 100,000 has been allocated from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) to support any relief operation that may be required. The Federation's Africa Department and the Disaster Management and Coordination (DMC) Division are coordinating the response and have made contact with the Red Cross of the DRC as well as the Rwanda Red Cross. A Federation FACT Team is already operational in the Congo and has been alerted to the potential crisis and will be tasked to support response and assessment depending on the evolving situation. In addition, the Federation's DMC Division has issued a second FACT Alert to reinforce the current team as needed.

The Rwanda Red Cross has teams in the Ruhengeri area who are moving towards the site and an additional three teams will be sent. A Spanish Red Cross delegate currently working in Kigali will travel with one of these teams. A Spanish Red Cross doctor and another delegate have also been offered. The German Red Cross has delegates in Rwanda and has been contacted to review who may be available if needed. The Federation Head of Regional Delegation is travelling to Kigali tomorrow and will be available to support the response as needed. In 1994 a Federation Volcano Activity Assessment Team was dispatched to complete a detailed risk analysis on the scenario that may develop with a major eruption and this report will provide useful guidelines for an effective response if necessary. The report highlighted in particular the high risk of potential explosions created by the location of aviation fuel tanks in the line of the most likely lava flow, and clearly such a risk remains.

The DMC FACT officer has been in contact with his OCHA/UNDAC counterpart in Geneva who is aware of the presence and support of the Federation FACT Team in the Congo.

Needs

The immediate priority is to fully assess the extent of the impact and the numbers of affected and their condition, evaluate needs, and prepare resources to address these needs. For this the provision of suitable FACT delegates for the immediate response are important. As soon as credible data and information are available a decision will be taken with the Red Cross of the DRC regarding the preparation and launch of an 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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