

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: LANDSLIDES

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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 Situation

A massive landslide at midnight on 1 April 2002 in Papua New Guinea killed or buried alive 36 people. Ten bodies have been retrieved from the mud and debris and another 26 are unaccounted. The disaster occurred 8km south east of Wantoat Local Level Government station and 79km north west of Lae-Morobe Province. Heavy rain had been reported throughout the province at the end of March and beginning of April, 2002. An earthquake, measuring 5.3 on the Richter Scale, also struck on Monday, 01 April and could have been a contributory factor to the disaster.

Twenty nine houses were buried by the landslide at the Napna, Piung and Damiping hamlets of Kobung village, 6km south west of the Wanton Government station. Eleven of the injured are in Wantoat Rural Health centre and one person who was badly hurt was airlifted to Angau Memorial Hospital, Lae according to the joint assessment report 13 April 2002 by the Morobe Provincial Disaster Management Office and PNG Red Cross Morobe Branch. The hamlets were on the edge of a river. The disaster was sparked by a side of a mountain slipping and crashing into a river below, throwing tonnes of mud into the air that then fell on the nearby hamlets.

The landslides covered about 1 sq km. As of 23 April, 29 families - 163 people - have been relocated in two different care centers; where they are living under temporary shelters. Unfortunately, these 29 families have lost their food gardens, cash crops, livestock as well as other belongings. The provincial government is providing basic food relief i.e. rice and tin fish for the time being, with the help of Morobe business community. People are getting water for drinking and cooking from a creek, nearby the care centre. Provincial health authorities have collected samples of water to carry out tests, in case the water is being polluted from decomposing bodies, as reported by the affected community during interviews with the Red Cross. 444 people from 83 families from Kupung, Guapsit and Taput villages need to be relocated in two care centres for a time being, due to smell of decomposing bodies.

The road network had been cut-off two weeks before the disaster due to heavy rain and other small scale landslides. It is still inaccessible. The provincial Government is continuing the expensive relief efforts, using a helicopter, including movement of the relief team and local government experts to assess the water/sanitation situation. "We do not know for how long it's possible by the provincial government to continue with this relief effort. We are spending a big amount of money for hiring a chopper, which is the only means to get access to the affected area," says the provincial disaster management co-ordinator, Morobe province. Tarpaulins, blankets, cooking utensils, old clothing from the Provincial Government and Red Cross DP stock in Lae have been provided for the 163 affected people. Garden tools (i.e. bush knives, spades, axes), building tools (i.e. saws,

hammers, nails) and more clothing found needed by the joint assessment team. The water at the creek is not sufficient to cater for drinking and cooking purposes at the care center. The provincial authority has been requested and agreed to send a local government water officer to carry out technical assessment on water availability and the type of water system required. "We have managed the situation so far. A geologist from the National Observatory Centre office at Port Moresby is now visiting the affected region. We are waiting for his recommendation, to see whether people can go back to their old place; or if we have to look for a safe piece of land in order to permanently resettle these 163 people from 29 families. Following this a plan of action will be prepared for necessary finance from the donors to provide accommodation, water & sanitation and basic health facilities as well," the provincial disaster management co-ordinator, Morobe province said.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The PNG Red Cross, through its branch network in Morobe, has assisted the provincial administration in the provision of emergency relief for these 163 people with tarpaulins, blankets, cooking utensils and used clothing. A combined assessment has been completed at the end of last week by the provincial administration and PNG Red Cross Morobe branch, to see if there are further needs. Based on the findings of the assessment team, there is a requirement for used clothings, garden tools (i.e. bush knives, spades, axes) and building tools (i.e. saws, hammers, nails). There are plans to distribute the above items to the affected people this week from the Lae Red Cross DP stock. Quick action by the Red Cross has been appreciated by the stakeholders. PNGRCs branches, National Headquarters and the country delegation are keeping close liaison with the provincial disaster management authority. Other organisations, such as National Disaster management Office, AusAID, World Vision and Caritas, are communicating with the PNG Red Cross and the Delegation for the latest updates.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see www.ifrc.org

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