

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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Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) Allocated: None

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

After several months of reports of vegetation dying off at the summit of Mt. Pago in Witori Caldera (near Hoskins) in West New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea, small earthquakes and temors began occurring around the base of the mountain on Friday 2 July. On the morning of 5 August thick dark gray ash and sulfurous fumes began billowing out. An aerial inspection by the Rabaul Volcanological Observatory (RVO) showed increased activity from 5 vents on the northwest flank of the Pago cone, including short lava flows were also seen from the vents. RVO noticed that the main vent had commenced activity, and an explosion had been heard. Witori Caldera has long been recognized as active and is considered a potential dangerous volcano in the area. Since the Mt. Pago and Witori volcano are located in the same caldera, there is a possibility that the eruption of Mt. Pago may have a similar effect on the Witori volcano. At this stage, however, no eruption activities have been recorded at Witori. According to the latest RVO report, the current rate of eruptions may continue with slight fluctuations, and continue indefinitely. The current level of the eruptions at the moment is considered small in magnitude, but the situation could rapidly deteriorate. The latest eruption of Mt Pago was in 1911, but that occurrence resulted in ashes being into the environment for 22 (twenty two) years and there is some possibilities that this could occur again.

In the town of Hoskins, the airport was closed due to ash fall. Approximately 5,000 people from about 9 villages around the base of Mt. Pago had by Monday evacuated their villages and moved to the township of Kimbe. The evacuees were accommodated at town facilities, with the local church and with the Salvation Army Center. According to the Provincial Disaster Management Office, more people may have to be evacuated if the volcanic activities intensify. If the current trend of eruption continues, many local fields and cash crops already affected in the areas could become severely affected due to the ash falls

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The PNG Red Cross Society (PNGRCS) is keeping a close contact with the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) in order to monitor the development of eruption activities of Mt. Pago. The PNGRCS Rabaul branch sent their representative into the area to obtain first hand information. The PNGRCS maintains a DP container in East New Britain with stocks of emergency relief items. These items can be deployed to Kimbe quickly once the need is identified. Some 50,000 kina can be made available from headquarters for the purchase of relief goods if further required. If there is a need for a baseline assessment for the identification of the beneficiaries, it can be done by the national society DP program officer, members of DART (national society

disaster and relief team) and the head of delegation. The Provincial Administration (PA) and several church organizations in the area have also been working to cover the needs. The PA has issued an appeal for assistance, but it is vague and without proper verification. The PNGRCS is for the moment on stand-by until the outcome of the NDMO meeting (scheduled for Friday).

Government Action

Provincial Administration response:

The Provincial Disaster Office has allocated 100,000 Kina for the initial evacuation exercise - mostly for food - and have deployed officers to the disaster areas to coordinate the initial assessment and the continuous voluntary evacuations.

National Government response:

The RVO has installed temporary instruments in Mt. Pago and is monitoring the situation closely. The Director General of the NDMO is visiting the affected areas. The members of NDMO, including the PNGRCS, are participating in briefings.

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

For further details please contact:

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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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