

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

VANUATU: EARTHQUAKE

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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. Vanuatu is covered by the Pacific's regional appeal 01.40/02.

The Situation

Aftershocks continue to frighten the population of Vanuatu's main island of Efate after the strongest earthquake for seven years, measuring 7.3 on the Richter scale, rocked the Pacific island nation on 3 January 2002. The latest tremor was felt at 6am local time on 5 January. People have been warned of further aftershocks and advised to move out of vulnerable structures and take precautions.

There have been no report of serious casualties but the earthquake caused major damage to buildings and infrastructure. Many buildings in the capital, Port Vila - including those of the Ministry of Education, Lycee Antoine de Bouganville School as well as factories and shops - are unsafe. The Teoma bridge, which links the southern coast of Efate to the capital, has been destroyed. Three bridges linking Port Vila to North Efate (Mele, Prima and La Colle bridges), including the vulnerable low-lying communities near Mele Bay, have been seriously damaged. Landslides blocked the road to the main wharf, buried a steep road in Klems Hill area and also damaged some crops. Heavy rain - a possibility as cyclone season is until April - or further aftershocks could cause more landslides, especially on the western hillsides of Efate. Supplies of power, water and telecommunications have been interrupted.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Vanuatu Red Cross Society's (VRCS) Operation Centre is still being run from a tent in the VRCS Headquarters compound as the office building was damaged. The Red Cross response has so far focused on medical assistance for those who suffered minor injuries, psychological support for people in shock, and provision of shelter for families who cannot return to their homes.

A VRCS disaster response team of 11 volunteers, trained in first aid and disaster response, was deployed immediately after the earthquake to Port Vila as well as Mele, Melemaat, Blacksands, and Erangorango, the most vulnerable communities in the low-lying flood plain area. All VRCS staff and volunteers based on Efate are on 24-hour standby.

Fear of a tsunami following the earthquake prompted 500 people from low-lying areas to flee to higher ground 2 km from their homes. However, the Department of Geology and Mines has ruled out a tsunami risk at present, and the Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) is broadcasting safety information to assure the evacuees that the situation is under control. VRCS has provided man-to-man counselling to build confidence and avoid panic among evacuees. It has provided transportation for over 190 people to return to their homes. VRCS has set up five tents to provide temporary shelters for those in fear of returning to unsafe homes.

VRCS will continue to be on alert to monitor possible water contamination and food problems as well as further shelter needs after future aftershocks or heavy rain. It is maintaining close contact with the NDMO and community leaders in vulnerable areas.

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

For further details please contact :

The Regional Delegation for the Pacific in Suva, Fiji; Phone 679 311855; Fax 679 311406; email ifrcfj00@ifrc.org.

Satoshi Sugai, Phone 41 22 7304-273; 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 and Pacific Department