

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

VIETNAM: FLOODS

20 August 2002

Information Bulletin N° 1/02

This Information Bulletin is being issued based on the needs described below reflecting the information available at this time. Based on further updates and details from assessment reports, or should the situation deteriorate, in conjunction with the Vietnam Red Cross Society (VNRC), the Federation will consider requesting international support through an emergency appeal.

The Situation

In most parts of Vietnam, people are again facing different types of hazards: floods, flash floods and landslides. In the Northern provinces, torrential rains caused flash floods and inundation in Lai Chau, Lao Cai, Ha Giang and Tuyen Quang provinces. Some 27 people are reported dead and 30 houses are either collapsed or washed away. Crops have been destroyed and roads eroded.

The water in the Red and Thai Binh rivers has been at high levels for many days. Heavy rains worsened this in the last weekend. Water leaking and cracks occurred in many parts of the dyke system. These damaged parts were repaired by the local authorities and the people.

The Government's Central Committee for Flood and Storm Control (CCFSC) instructed the government and other concerned agencies at different levels to monitor the flood situation closely and undertake appropriate response measures.

The country's Prime Minister emphasised that the first priority was to protect the Hoa Binh Reservoir, the biggest one in the North of Vietnam, and the dyke system, especially the dykes surrounding Hanoi. In order to prevent flooding of Hanoi, two of the bottom gates of the Hoa Binh dam were closed. This will help to reduce to flood level in Hanoi to under Alarm Level III. However, the water flow coming to the Reservoir remains very high due to the heavy rains upstream. If the situation deteriorates further, some parts of the local dyke will be broken to allow water flood neighbouring provinces to Hanoi. To prepare for this scenario, all functional sectors were alerted to quickly respond, e.g. by repairing weak parts of the dyke and by helping local people to evacuate to safer places.

The central and central highland provinces - that a week ago were suffering from drought- have experienced heavy rains causing floods in many places. The worst affected provinces are Dac Lac and Lam Dong where about 5,000 houses, over 8,500 ha rice and other crops were flooded. Many other central provinces have also been affected by floods due to long lasting rains.

Storm No. 3 currently in the East Sea, near Hainan Island, is moving to the north and is forecast to make landfall in China north of Hainan Island shortly. This storm is expected to cause further heavy rainfall in the northern provinces of Vietnam. If this happens, all the rivers in the area, which are already swollen, will further flood.

In the Mekong River Delta, the water level is rising above Alarm level II (Dangerous flood condition) and in some areas, it is approaching Alarm level III.

The flood water level and dyke management work is monitored and controlled closely by, respectively, the Provincial and District Committees for Flood and Storm Control (CFSC) at different levels. Information about the flood situation is regularly communicated between the central and grassroots levels of the responsible government agencies as well as broadcast on the mass media to the wider audience.

Geographically, the latest situation can be summarized as follows:

Northern Provinces: From late July, there were torrential rains in the northern provinces of Vietnam, which caused flash floods and landslides in many areas. The worst affected provinces were Bac Kan, Lao Cai, Tuyen Quang, Thai Nguyen and Lai Chau.

According to the damage report by the Standing Office of the CCFSC, 10 people were killed, 110 houses collapsed and more than 135,000 households were seriously affected. Nearly 5,000 ha of rice paddy and subsidiary crops were inundated with large portions of local road having been washed away.

Local authorities in the provinces have provided some financial support to the worst affected households and for the repair of damaged infrastructure. However, these provinces are amongst the poorest in the country, so the local support was far from meeting the needs of the worst affected people.

The current needs of the affected people are, mainly, rice, household items, such as mosquito nets, blankets, cooking utensils, soap and housing material.

Red River Delta Provinces: The water level in all rivers are at or above Alarm level III (Very dangerous or Emergency flood condition). There has been some erosion of dykes and leakage in some places.

Central and Central Highlands Provinces: Quang Binh, Quang Tri, Thua Thien Hue, Da Nang, Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Ninh Thuan, Binh Thuan, Dak Lak and Gia Lai provinces, were facing until recently, a serious shortage of water (average rainfall in the first seven months of 2002 was equal to 50% and 70% of that in the same period of last year). The dry season was longer than normal. The water evaporation was also much higher than the average rate. Rains were distributed unequally and occurred only in some few areas.

Over 98,000 ha of rice lacked water, of which about 55,000 ha was affected heavily and over 32,000 ha were destroyed; about 70,000 ha of other subsidiary and industrial crops were affected of which about 29,000 ha were lost almost totally. The population hence faced a difficult period with over 800,000 people short of water for their daily needs, including water for livestock. In the worst affected areas the poorest were short of food and cash. Most of the worst affected areas were dependent on rainwater and there is limited hydraulic structures for water supply. Specific measures to cope with drought were identified (drilling more wells, cleaning canals, providing water purification tablets, transporting clean water to worst affected places, preparing fertiliser and seedlings).

In the last few days the situation has changed completely with heavy rainfall most of these areas.

Mekong Delta Provinces: The water level is raising rapidly to Alarm level II (Dangerous flood condition) and may soon reach Alarm level III (Very dangerous flood condition). Most of the summer-autumn rice crops has been harvested already, except for some minor loss due to high water levels. In An Giang Province, three people, including two children drowned.

The local authorities are helping the people to harvest remaining rice crops, strengthening protective local dykes, pumping water out of the fields to protect un-harvested rice, sugar cane, fruit trees and aqua culture areas. The construction and preparation of areas for reallocation and evacuation are being speeded up. The establishment of local disaster response teams ('shock-brigade teams'), rescue posts and childcare centres are being undertaken.

Information about the flood situation is regularly transmitted to the local population and responsible agencies through the local CFSC and Red Cross.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Northern Provinces: The VNRC at different levels, in co-operation with other concerned agencies and organisations, participated in the search and rescue and evacuation efforts; the Society mobilised the staff, members and volunteers to contribute materials and labour to help the affected households in repairing their houses as well as with food support.

The Society's National Headquarters released from reserve stock 600 household kits, comprising a mosquito net, two blankets and a kitchen set contained in a large plastic bucket, to assist the most affected households in the three provinces of Bac Kan, Tuyen Quang and Lao Cai. Subsequently two additional provinces of Ha Giang and Lai Chau have been affected. The Provincial Red Cross has mobilized approximately 40,000 staff/volunteers/members to assist the affected people in evacuation, the provision of First Aid, the repair of homes, the distribution of emergency relief/water purification tablet and to clean up the environment.

Red River Delta Provinces: The VNRC at different levels is participating in the local efforts to cope with the flooding. Local Red Cross staff and volunteers have helped affected people to evacuate, repair their houses and are mobilizing mutual support among the people themselves. Local Red Cross disaster preparedness funds were also used to provide relief to the affected people.

The VNRC Headquarters requested all the Red Cross Chapters in the disaster prone provinces to follow the VNRC guidelines on: "*Humanitarian Need Assessment in Emergency Situation*" and to utilise the established disaster reporting formats.

This year, 40 sirens for early warning purposes were provided by the Red Cross to three provinces, including Hoa Binh (supported by DIPECHO in co-operation with the Disaster Management Centre of the Department of Dyke Management and Flood and Storm Control, MARD). This system is already proving effective.

Central and Central Highlands Provinces: The VNRC members and volunteers were mobilised to help the affected people in their response efforts. As in the northern provinces, the provincial Red Cross has organised staff/volunteers to assist local people and to gather local contributions.

Mekong Delta Provinces: The VNRC at different levels is mobilising its members and volunteers in order to assist the local people in the above-mentioned activities. Annual flooding of the Mekong occurs and is by nature slow onset. Seasonal fluctuations in water levels are being carefully monitored at the local level and at HQ. Lifesaving training was organised for 30 VNRC volunteers from the 12 Mekong Delta provinces earlier this month (supported by AusAID). The newly trained trainers will be involved in training other lifesavers in their provinces.

Vietnam Red Cross disaster preparedness

Provincial and district levels prepared disaster preparedness plans. These plans were consolidated by the respective Committee for Flood and Storm Control (CFSC) from the disaster preparedness plans of the member agencies, including the VNRC. All Red Cross Provincial and district branches of the VNRC are members of CFSC.

During late 2001/early 2002 (with financial support from DIPECHO and AusAID) the VNRC organised a five day training in disaster preparedness and response for over 600 district and provincial Red Cross staff in the 33 most disaster prone provinces of the country.

In the Central Provinces (with financial support from UNDP) the VNRC trained about 600 commune staff from 30 communes in 3 provinces of Quang Binh, Quang Tri and Quang Nam. Trainers are currently conducting hazard, vulnerability and capacity assessment in the 30 communes. Results from these assessments will be used to improve the existing disaster preparedness/response plans in these communes.

In July, a review workshop on "*Lessons learnt from the Mekong floods in Vietnam, in 2000 and 2001*" (organised by the VNRC/International Federation and funded by AusAID) was held to discuss issues gathered from consultation meetings with about 300 beneficiaries and 100 representatives from different organisations.

A major public awareness campaign: “*Living with the floods*” in the Mekong River Delta was launched in 2001 by the VNRC (supported by UNICEF/AusAID). 2,500 school teachers and 100,000 grade 4 and 5 children were trained. A video film: “*Living with the floods*”, comprising best practice before, during and after floods was developed and is to be sent to 12 Mekong River Delta provinces for broadcast on provincial television. The video is also to be used for public awareness raising in more remote communes. 1,500 posters and 80,000 brochures around the same theme were printed and are being distributed to clinics, schools, local government offices and other public places in the most flood prone areas.

In addition many VNRC offices and Disaster Preparedness Centres have been provided with communications equipment, emergency response materials and facilities to strengthen their capacity for the coming disaster season.

The majority of a 106 primary schools, constructed by the VNRC, in five of the most flood prone provinces, will be completed within the next two months. These schools, located in safer locations and built to a safer design should allow approximately 20,000 students to continue their studies even in times of floods.

Disaster Management Capacity

The Federation’s Regional Disaster Management Unit based in Bangkok is fully apprised of the situation and is in regular contact with the Federation Delegation in Hanoi and VNRC. A Federation disaster response/preparedness delegate - also a field assessment and coordination team (FACT) member - is being deployed from Bangkok to Hanoi tomorrow (Wednesday).

In the meantime, as a precautionary measure at this stage, clearance for the deployment of a FACT team is being obtained from the relevant Vietnamese authorities. The Federation Secretariat has sent an information message to all the FACT trained personnel to raise the awareness and preparedness to assist in response.

The Federation’s disaster management and coordination division is coordinating the overall disaster response planning, in full collaboration with the Asia Pacific department, including the Vietnam delegation in Hanoi, the South East Asia regional delegation in Bangkok and desk.

For further details please contact :

- *The Vietnam Red Cross Society in Hanoi: Phone +84 4 943 2179; Fax + 84 4 943 2930; email Vinh15856@fpt.vn*
- *Bo Backstrom, Federation Head of Delegation in Vietnam, based in Hanoi: +84 4 942 2983; email <backstro@ifrc.org>*
- *Charles Eldred-Evans/Sandra Rosner, Phone 41 22 730 4320/4456; Fax 41 22 733 0395; email <eldred@ifrc.org> or <rosner@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.

John Horekens
Director
Division of External Relations

Simon Missiri
Head
Asia & Pacific Department