

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

REPUBLIC OF CONGO: EBOLA EPIDEMIC

14 February, 2003

Information Bulletin N° 02

Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) allocated: N/A

This Bulletin is for information only. While the Federation is not seeking any funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time, based on assessments of the evolving situation the Federation may launch an appeal to respond to the needs.

The Disaster

Since December 2002, the Republic of Congo has experienced new outbreaks of the extremely dangerous Ebola Haemorrhagic Fever in the remote forest towns of Mbomo and Kellé situated near the border with Gabon (Western Cuvette region). Reports indicate there are now a total of between 35 to 60 deaths. The epidemic began in the Mbomo hunting zone where the first Ebola epidemic raged in 2001 - 2002. The authorities were first alerted when a clan of gorillas in the region started dying sometime in December. The outbreak is characterized by fever, diarrhoea, hemorrhagic syndrome, and intense fatigue. The outbreak is expected to continue as new cases are still being reported in the affected zone.

The situation is made more difficult by the inherent reluctance, misunderstanding, and mistrust of the local population, a lack of access to the affected area (particularly in the zone of Kellé), and the flow of local populations across borders.

Government Action

There is currently a joint mission being undertaken by the Ministry of Health, the WHO, and the Republic of Congo Red Cross to assess the situation, confirm the epidemic outbreak from the samples taken from the suspected cases, and co-ordinate the activities of the fight against the epidemic. No isolation centre has been set up so far. A WHO expert from Geneva arrived in Brazzaville on February 11 and is being deployed to the affected region. The official confirmation that this outbreak is indeed Ebola is expected shortly.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Continued sensitisation and social mobilisation activities in the field under the supervision of the joint mission Ministry of Health (Government) and partners. So far the Red Cross has been able to gain some trust from the usually hostile and fearful population who suspect medical workers to bring the virus to the region. The Red Cross volunteers will need to be reinforced and supported in their activities.

Urgent Needs

The Federation Delegation is preparing a plan of action and budget for the probable launch of an Emergency Appeal to support the following initial needs:

- consolidation of social mobilisation activities in the districts of Kellé, Mbomo and Etoumbi;
- recruitment and training of additional volunteers for the two most concerned Red Cross committees;
- reinforcement of logistic means through an additional protective equipment such as aprons, boots, plastic gloves, masks;
- purchase of bicycles motorbikes; information material such as leaflets, posters, images boxes, megaphones; etc., blankets, buckets and disinfectants;
- provide support to the Red Cross local committees with a small stock of protection equipment and disinfecting materials.

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

For further details please contact:

- *the Federation's Delegation: 00 243 880 1488; the Information and Reporting Officer: 00 243 990 33 34 / 00 243 081 812 4239 or the Regional Resource Person: zamjack02@hotmail.com*
- *Terry Carney, Phone 41 22 730.42.98; Fax 41 22 733 0395; email terry.carney@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
External Relations Division

Bekele Geleta
Head
Africa Department