

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

GUATEMALA: RIOTS

25 July 2003

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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

In Guatemala, political campaigns are underway in view of the forthcoming elections of the President of the Republic. One of the strongest candidates is General Efraín Ríos Montt, the major figurehead of the Guatemalan Republican Front (GRF) party, a former dictator in the years 1982 and 1983, and who stands accused of grave human rights violations.

Recently, the Constitutional Court accepted the presidential candidature of the General; however, an appeal introduced by opposition parties before the Supreme Court resulted in suspension of the candidacy. These events have resulted in fierce political and legal controversies, leading to rioting headed by hundreds of Guatemalan Republican Front supporters in the most strategic areas of the capital.

On 24 July, hundreds of GRF supporters launched demonstrations in the capital, blocking traffic and causing riots. In Zone 10 of the capital, several demonstrators attacked members of the press and a renowned journalist died of a heart attack and others were trapped in the buildings of the Constitutional Court. National police and armed forces have so far done little to restore order and there is, as yet, no clear information regarding numbers of dead and injured.

There are fears that the situation may deteriorate further if the GRF leaders do not demobilize militants and the government does not take efficient measures to deal with the crisis. However, the President, through a television and radio announcement, declared on the afternoon of 24 July that he had given orders to the security forces to halt the violence and restore order. Several people continued to be held hostage in the business centre, including elderly persons in need of assistance.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

In the early hours of the morning of 24 July, 35 volunteers from the Guatemalan Red Cross (GRC), specialized in first aid, rescue and crisis intervention, were mobilized in key areas of the city most affected by the riots. In addition, eight emergency units were put in place to ensure the transfer of patients requiring medical attention. In the evening, three GRC ambulances and 20 additional volunteers were deployed. The GRC volunteers assisted four patients suffering from dehydration who were transferred to medical centres and the 30 people trapped in the Constitutional Court were evacuated. Trained members of the GRC crisis intervention teams (TICs) are also assisting people suffering trauma as a result of the events. Guatemalan Red Cross volunteers succeeded during the evening of 24 July, following intense negotiation with GRF demonstrators, in persuading the rioters to release 400 people held in the business centre. GRC volunteers assisted by members of the fire service, then transported those in need of care after long hours of captivity.

The President of the Guatemalan Red Cross activated the emergency operations centre supported by the director general, the head of the relief department, the head of communications and press, the Federation representative and representatives of the American, Netherlands and Spanish Red Cross Societies. As a result, there is an on-going analysis of the political situation and of Red Cross intervention to assist victims of the rioting. Each of the 25 branches of the Guatemalan Red Cross is on alert and a circular relating to security norms has been issued. The national coordination body in times of disaster, CONRED, has been activated and the Guatemalan Red Cross is represented by the head of the relief department.

The Federation delegation in Guatemala is providing constant support to the Guatemalan Red Cross and ensuring liaison with the Federation's regional delegation in Panama and the ICRC regional delegation in Mexico. Information is constantly shared with the ICRC office in Guatemala and an ICRC delegate is due to arrive in the capital today, 25 July.

Further information will be provided as the situation develops.

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

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