

# 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

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## CAMEROON: CHOLERA EPIDEMIC

### In Brief

This Information Bulletin no. 01/2004 is being issued for information only. The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

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### The Situation

Douala, the second largest town in Cameroon, has been affected by a cholera epidemic since early January 2004. The situation occurred as a result of a lack of adherence to hygiene rules regarding potable water. On 18 February 2004, twenty people were reported dead with over 380 others still under observation. About 9,000 persons are exposed to the epidemic, which was officially declared by the Ministry of Public Health in early February 2004.

### Red Cross and Red Crescent action

To mount a response campaign, the Wouri Divisional Committee of the Cameroon Red Cross (CRC) in Douala mobilized 60 volunteers divided into groups of five persons each. These volunteers have been steadily sensitizing the populations affected to the rules they need to respect in order to stop the progression of the epidemic. CRC volunteers are carrying out a door-to-door campaign to sensitize people through public and private media. CRC volunteers, trained by *Medecin Sans Frontiere* (MSF) in water treatment, started treating contaminated wells and water sources to build up their capacity in sensitizing populations to basic hygiene rules.

Populations readily allow CRC volunteers to access their wells and treat the water. The task is relatively easy to volunteers because they are familiar with the affected areas. In fact, they usually carry out other daily CRC activities in that locality within the framework of community-based health and AIDS control.

To support the activities of CRC volunteers, the Federation's Regional Office for Central Africa offered sensitizing

tools such as 1000 folios and 500 posters on “how to avoid cholera”. The office also offered agricultural implements including eight wheelbarrows, 45 shovels, 18 hoes, 40 cutlasses and 70 pairs of boots. CRC volunteers in Douala received these tools on 17 February 2004, and immediately started using posters, folios and megaphones to intensify the Information, Education and Communication (IEC) campaign.

On 20 February 2004, over 5000 people out of the 9000 who were exposed to cholera were sensitized.

Volunteers used sanitation tools to clean out gutters and drain stagnant water. The community is now aware of the risks of the cholera disease and the epidemic has been brought under control. However, some new cases of cholera have been registered in other residential areas in Douala, and CRC volunteers are already at work to stop the progression of the epidemic.

### **Action of the Government and other organizations**

The Government ensures the coordination of field activities through the Douala Provincial Delegation of the Ministry of Public Health and provided the chlorine used for the treatment of wells and water sources. MSF installed three 1,000-liter tanks of water in Bepanda (a residential area in Douala), which is the epicentre of the epidemic. MSF also ensured the training of mixed teams (health workers from the Ministry of Public Health, the Police, and CRC volunteers) in the treatment of wells using chlorine.

### **Needs**

To prevent a reoccurrence of cholera in the future, CRC volunteers are being encouraged to carry out sensitizing activities at the same time every year. An emergency stock of sensitizing and agricultural tools will be made available to the CRC's Wouri Local Committee to ensure an efficient and timely response to disasters.

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