

# 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

## UNITED STATES: HURRICANES KATRINA AND RITA

5 October 2005

*The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 181 countries.*

### In Brief

This Final Bulletin (no. 12/2005) is being issued for information only. It is based on updates from the American Red Cross (ARC) related to the humanitarian response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, reflecting the status of the situation and information available at this time.

The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time. The American Red Cross webpage ([www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)) contains additional information on the evolving situation, the relief response to Hurricane Katrina, a tracing link, as well as information on donating to the National Disaster Relief Fund. To access information in Spanish please refer to the ARC Spanish webpage [www.cruzrojaamericana.org](http://www.cruzrojaamericana.org)

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*All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisations \(NGO's\) in Disaster Relief](#) and is committed to the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.*

*For longer-term programmes in this or other countries or regions, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal. For support to or for further information concerning Federation programmes or operations in this or other countries, or for national society profiles, please also access the Federation's website at <http://www.ifrc.org>*

### Background

On 29 August 2005, one of the most destructive hurricanes in recent United States history struck the U.S. Gulf Coast, a region that includes portions of several states along the Gulf of Mexico. Hurricane Katrina and related flooding resulted in more than 1,000 fatalities, primarily in Mississippi and Louisiana, but also in Florida, Alabama, and Georgia. Hundreds of thousands of people were displaced, scores of homes were rendered uninhabitable, and disaster declarations were issued covering 90,000 square miles of land.

Hurricane Rita made landfall along the Louisiana and eastern Texas coasts on 24 September 2005, nearly a month after Hurricane Katrina. Though the storm proved less destructive than Katrina, and it largely spared the major cities of Houston, Texas and New Orleans, Louisiana, it nonetheless resulted in at least six deaths in Texas and Mississippi. While Louisiana appears to have recorded no casualties, New Orleans, Louisiana was partly flooded once more. The system, a Category-3 hurricane on the Saffir-Simpson scale at landfall, knocked down power lines, sparked fires, uprooted trees, and inundated coastal areas of Louisiana with 15-foot storm surge. Major disaster declarations were issued for both Texas and Louisiana.

Floodwaters are receding and many of those affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita now face decisions regarding where and how to begin picking up the pieces of their lives. Some may relocate and make a new start while others return home to assess what remains, salvage what they can, and begin their recovery. For those returning to disaster affected areas, authorities are encouraging people to stagger their re-entry to limit confusion and not overwhelm existing services and systems. Precautions have been issued regarding the safety of the water supply and the handling of debris. Authorities in New Orleans, Louisiana have indicated that about 22,000 cubic yards of the estimated 50 million cubic yards of debris believed to be in New Orleans has been removed.

## **Red Cross and Red Crescent action**

### **Specific Mandate of the American Red Cross in natural disaster response**

In providing disaster relief, the American Red Cross has both a legal and a moral mandate. The Red Cross has both the power and the duty to act in disaster, and prompt action is clearly expected and supported by the public. The Red Cross authority to perform disaster services was formalized when the organization was chartered by the Congress of the United States in 1905. Among other provisions, this charter charged the Red Cross —

*...to continue and carry on a system of national and international relief in time of peace and apply the same in mitigating the sufferings caused by pestilence, famine, fire, floods, and other great national calamities, and to devise and carry on measures for preventing the same.*

— *U.S. Congress, Act of January 5, 1905, as amended, 36 U.S.C*

The Charter is not only a grant of power, but also an imposition of duties and obligations to the nation, to disaster victims, and to the people who generously support its work with their donations. The American Red Cross seeks and welcomes cooperation from other organizations in carrying out its responsibilities and seeks to serve as a channel for the generosity of the American people. In preparing for and responding to disasters, the American Red Cross works with government agencies and civil authorities, voluntary and non-profit agencies, business and labor, and individuals and small groups. In addition to directly assisting disaster victims, the American Red Cross serves in both coordination and referral roles to match needs with resources.

Led by volunteers and guided by its Congressional Charter and the Fundamental Principles of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (Movement), each year, the American Red Cross responds immediately to more than 70,000 disasters, including house or apartment fires (the majority of disaster responses), hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, hazardous materials spills, transportation accidents, explosions, and other natural and man-made disasters.

American Red Cross disaster relief focuses on meeting people's immediate disaster-caused emergency needs. This includes providing shelter, food, and health and mental health services. In addition to these services, the core of Red Cross disaster relief is the financial assistance given to individuals and families affected by disaster to enable them to resume their normal daily activities independently. The American Red Cross also feeds emergency workers, handles inquiries from concerned family members outside the disaster area, provides blood and blood products to disaster victims, and helps those affected by disaster to access other available resources.

### **American Red Cross Response**

The first priority of the American Red Cross before, during, and after any disaster is to provide safe shelter, food and safe drinking water, physical and emotional health services, and assistance in re-connecting with family members. Supplies, such as clean-up kits and comfort kits, may also be provided. This is standard across the more than 900 domestic chapters during disaster response for the American Red Cross. These services are available

through American Red Cross offices, shelters, fixed or mobile feeding sites, and service centers located in and around the disaster-affected areas. This emergency assistance is being provided to those affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita. To date, the following sheltering, feeding, and emotional and physical support have been provided:

- Sheltering/Temporary Housing:
  - In total, the American Red Cross has provided nearly **400,000** hurricane survivors with more than **3.1 million overnight stays** in **1,150 shelters** across **25 states** and the District of Columbia.
  - The American Red Cross has housed more than **35,000** survivors in nearly **280** shelters and housed more than **472,000** people in hotels or motels in 48 states and the District of Columbia.
  - The number and location of American Red Cross shelters changes as they close, reopen, or move, according to need. Shelter residents receive warm meals, clothes, and personal items, including deodorant, soap, toothbrush, personal products, and diapers. Emotional care is provided, as is medical assessment, first aid, and medical care. The privacy of shelter residents is protected, and unaccompanied minors are assigned to an American Red Cross disaster worker until the proper authorities are contacted.
- Feeding:
  - The American Red Cross, in coordination with the Southern Baptist Convention, has served more than **19 million** hot meals and more than **12.3 million** snacks to hurricane survivors. There are **15** kitchen sites open in Texas, **18** kitchen sites open in Louisiana, and **six** open in Mississippi.
- Emotional health services:
  - More than **1,200** licensed mental health experts—including counselors, social workers and volunteer nurses—have been recruited by the American Red Cross from professional organizations and assigned throughout Louisiana, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi and Texas.
  - To date, nearly **455,000** people have received Red Cross Disaster Mental Health services.
- Emergency financial assistance:
  - As of 3 October, the American Red Cross has distributed financial assistance to more than **825,000** families (**2.6 million** hurricane survivors), or more than half of the affected families.
  - The American Red Cross aims to reach at least **400,000** more affected families.
  - This aid is intended to meet urgent needs of those who lived in hardest hit areas until state and federal resources are available.
  - Everyone affected by Hurricane Katrina is eligible for the same financial assistance, including foreign nationals. However, embassies and consulates are reaching out to their citizens to offer services, including repatriation and mental health services. The American Red Cross will continue to address issues specific to foreign nationals and service delivery, including those related to financial assistance.

## Relationship of American Red Cross Domestic Response Services to International Services

The American Red Cross is a leader in disaster response within the U.S. and normally relies on its own resources in disasters. When the disaster-related needs either exceed the capacity to respond or should disaster-related needs conform to specialized skill sets, assistance is requested from Movement partners. American Red Cross has agreements with both their neighbors, the Canadian Red Cross and the Mexican Red Cross and has jointly trained relief workers who have supported American Red Cross in past catastrophic disasters. These relief workers were immediately mobilized for Katrina. In addition, as response needs for Katrina escalated, the American Red Cross called on national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for specific types of assistance, and on the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (Federation) Secretariat to assist in coordinating the requested support. The Movement response has been both generous and swift.

The American Red Cross International Services Department is the conduit through which offers of assistance from Movement partners and foreign governments are channelled back to American Red Cross Response Directorate and then matched, where possible, with operational identified needs.

### National Society Response: American Red Cross Volunteer and International Delegate Activities

In the largest response to a single natural disaster in the 125 years of the American Red Cross, more than **176,000** American Red Cross volunteers from chapters in all **50** states, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands to support

the chapters in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida in providing relief assistance. Volunteers are also actively supporting sheltering in over 20 states, offering additional guidance and support in their own communities, at National Headquarters, and assisting at call centers around the country.

The American Red Cross disaster response has received much-appreciated offers of support from many national societies. To date, over 30 partner national societies have offered delegates, and nearly 200 international delegates whose skill sets matched identified needs have been requested by the American Red Cross from over a dozen International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement partners, including the Federation and its Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU), ICRC, and several national Red Cross societies.

American Red Cross liaisons deployed to Texas, Louisiana, and Alabama to troubleshoot the inevitable challenges that arose during the effort to embed numerous Movement partners into a domestic response. In total, the delegates were integrated into domestic response operations in Louisiana (106), Mississippi (14), Alabama (47), Texas (24), and at American Red Cross National Headquarters in Washington, D.C. (5). Among the assistance that international delegates have provided are the following:

- Experienced logisticians from Spanish, Netherlands, British, Finnish, and Belgian Red Cross societies and the ICRC were sent to Gulfport, Mississippi, and Mobile, Alabama, where they were integrated into the domestic disaster response activities of the American Red Cross chapters in these states, with support from the American Red Cross International Services coordinator. These delegates assisted in establishing warehouse management and accountability systems in both Gulfport and Mobile to track the receipt and dispatch of goods, while also offering guidance to domestic volunteers with whom they worked.
- Volunteers from the Mexican Red Cross deployed to Houston, Texas where an American Red Cross liaison integrated them into domestic response activities. During their deployment, the Mexican Red Cross volunteers supported shelter operations (shelter preparation, maintenance, and crowd control) that benefited 24,000 people in the Houston Astrodome complex. They also provided specialized language assistance to help Spanish-speakers access relief services by gathering information from evacuees, answering questions about American Red Cross Disaster assistance, and offering information related to housing and jobs. The volunteers demonstrated great flexibility and willingness to take on whatever response activities were needed on a given day.
- The French, Norwegian, Belgian, and German Red Cross societies and the ICRC deployed delegates to Louisiana where they were integrated into the activities of the Southeast Louisiana American Red Cross chapter in Baton Rouge, Saint Tammany Parish and Jefferson Parish in Baton Rouge, Belgian Red Cross delegates provided logistical, warehousing, and transport to both the Operations Center and to four central warehouses. In Saint Tammany Parish, French and Norwegian Red Cross delegates provided logistical support to the largest American Red Cross kitchen in Louisiana. They re-organized the warehouse process and reviewed the goods requisition process to ensure the availability of sufficient quantities of goods. The German Red Cross delegates ensured at least three days worth of stocks were maintained in feeding kitchens throughout Jefferson Parish.
- Canadian Red Cross delegates were integrated into American Red Cross domestic disaster response activities in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, where they are helping to feed, shelter, and provide emotional support to tens of thousands of evacuees. They are also providing logistical and information assistance.

#### International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies Activities

Delegates from the Federation, including PADRU, were deployed to American Red Cross National Headquarters to assist in coordinating information about the disaster response, and to act as international spokespeople and representatives of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. This communications support filled a critical need as American Red Cross press officers had been deployed to the affected area to facilitate and conduct preparedness and safety messages, conduct interviews with national media, and manage response messages.

In its coordination role, the Federation served as a focal point for the operation with Red Cross and Red Crescent societies interested in supporting the operation. PADRU served as the focal point for the Latin American region while the Secretariat in Geneva served as a coordinator and facilitator for the other regions of the world. The Federation, at the request of the American Red Cross, facilitated the identification and deployment of over 60 professional logistics delegates to the operation. These delegates were deployed within 48 hours after the request and were active on-site supporting the American Red Cross logistics. The Secretariat played a key role in

ensuring its membership was fully informed of American Red Cross's response, interests, and needs through Information Bulletins and conference calls.

#### International Committee of the Red Cross Activities

The ICRC deployed logisticians upon request by the American Red Cross to the affected region. The logisticians set up a system for the efficient distribution of food and non-food items to those in the worst affected areas. They also provided support and suggestions regarding supply chain management.

Tracing specialists were deployed from the ICRC Protection and Central Tracing Agency Division in Geneva, Switzerland to Baton Rouge, Louisiana and Montgomery, Alabama. They conducted field assessments, trained volunteers, and restored family links to disaster affected people. The tracing specialists visited shelters across Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama to help people trying to find their families. They distributed cell phones, collected personal information to be added to the American Red Cross Family Linking Web site, and trained American Red Cross volunteers to ensure that the tools at the disposal of Katrina victims were well promoted and used. Tracing specialists from the British and Netherlands Red Cross national societies also supported family linking in Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana.

### **Katrina Family Linking Activities**

#### FamilyLinks Web site ([www.familylinks.icrc.org/katrina](http://www.familylinks.icrc.org/katrina))

The ICRC's FamilyLinks Web site, activated on behalf of those affected by Hurricane Katrina, has served as a means through which families and friends separated by the disaster have been able to re-establish contact with one another. More than 200,000 people have now registered themselves on the site either as someone seeking a missing relative or as someone who wanted to let relatives know they were safe. ICRC staff have answered more than 5,500 requests for information regarding the site. The Katrina Family Linking team is managing the return of all remaining Family Linking field staff to Washington, D.C. on Thursday, 29 September for debriefing on Friday, 30 September. The field team indicates that the emergency phase needs related to restoring family links have largely been met. Telephone lines are slowly being restored and clients have increasingly more access to phones and computers.

To date, **277,802** evacuees have reported their status and **32,993** concerned family members and friends have registered on line at the ICRC's Katrina Family Links Web site, [www.familylinks.icrc.org/katrina](http://www.familylinks.icrc.org/katrina). Data relating to Hurricane Katrina has now been transferred to the American Red Cross, at whose request the data is now stored on the KatrinaSafe Web site, [www.katrinSAFE.org](http://www.katrinSAFE.org). The ICRC's Katrina Family Links Web site will be deactivated within 30 days.

#### American Red Cross Family Linking Web site ([www.katrinSAFE.org](http://www.katrinSAFE.org))

American Red Cross, in partnership with Microsoft and the San Diego (California) Super Computer Center, created the American Red Cross Family Linking database to help families reconnect as they relocate across the country. American Red Cross Family Linking builds on the ICRC Web site. Those currently registered in American Red Cross shelters or on the ICRC Katrina Family Links Web site will be added onto the American Red Cross Family Linking Web site. When a person being sought is registered and matched, the seeker can request to be notified by e-mail or phone. Currently, the consolidated list has over 277,000 evacuee records. The information of those not wanting to be included will be removed from public view. To register on the site or access information, log on to [www.katrinSAFE.org](http://www.katrinSAFE.org) or [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) (click on Family Links Registry).

People without computer access, or who choose to register or search without a computer, can give or get information by calling, toll free, 1-877-LOVED-1S (1-877-568-3317). Please note that this information is available worldwide and is not confidential. To date, calls to 1-877-LOVED1S total **171,202**.

### **Financial and In-Kind Support**

#### Financial

The American Red Cross estimates that Hurricane Katrina relief efforts will exceed US \$2 billion, in order to meet the urgent needs of nearly one million families through feeding and sheltering, emergency financial assistance, and

physical and mental health services. As of 3 October 2005, the American Red Cross has spent or committed about US \$1.2 billion toward Hurricane Katrina relief. Of this money, US \$685 million has been used to provide financial assistance for more than **825,000** families. Funds have also been spent on providing food and shelter, counseling, and sending volunteers to the affected areas. Efforts continue to raise the funds necessary to meet the needs of at least another 400,000 disaster-affected families.

The American Red Cross extends its gratitude to those national societies that activated fundraising campaigns, activated their family link services, or have sent money or requested personnel to support this massive relief operation and welcomes continued interest by national societies to support relief efforts. The American Red Cross remains dependent upon the generosity of our neighbors at home and abroad to support the delivery of hurricane-related disaster response services.

To date, the American Red Cross has received nearly US \$1.1 billion in gifts and pledges, for which the organization is grateful, but much of this money remains in pledge form. National societies that have received donations on behalf of the American Red Cross are encouraged to contact the appropriate individual as listed on the first page of this bulletin for guidance in forwarding assistance.

### In-Kind

Currently, the American Red Cross has sufficient offers of in-kind donations to meet our needs, and so respectfully declines additional international offers of in-kind support. Due to the time sensitivity and complex nature of product needs, the American Red Cross has greatest success procuring product as close to the disaster site as possible, which avoids delays and transportation costs in getting basic necessities to disaster victims. The American Red Cross is especially appreciative of the financial contributions made by various national societies. Financial contributions allow the organization to purchase exactly what is needed in sufficient quantities as close to the disaster site as possible, and because the affected community has generally experienced significant economic loss, purchasing relief supplies in or close to the disaster site can help stimulate the local economy. Additionally, the American Red Cross has found that many of the areas of expertise offered by our partner national societies do not fit into the American Red Cross domestic response. For example, water purification and search and rescue are government responsibilities in the United States, and the American Red Cross cannot respond to these offers. Additionally, the American Red Cross does not typically send teams of doctors, does not distribute pharmaceuticals, nor does the national society establish field hospitals. Though these generous offers were sincerely appreciated, the American Red Cross is unable to utilize them.

### **Future Plans**

#### Volunteer Recruitment

In an effort to sustain this response, which may stretch over months and possibly even years to come, the American Red Cross is recruiting and training 40,000 new volunteers from the almost 900 American Red Cross chapters across the country. This is the single largest recruitment effort in the national society's history and will draw on the American Red Cross Disaster Services Human Resources Volunteer system.

#### Lessons Learned

The American Red Cross is immensely grateful for the help that partner national societies have provided and is interested in capturing lessons learned from the hurricane response, both in terms of what did and did not work well, so that similar future deployments may benefit from these lessons and run more effectively, whether they take place in the U.S. or another country. "Lessons learned" discussions have occurred and it is hoped they will continue and that this progress may inform international cooperation practices among Movement members.

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