

# ***CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: FLOODS***

21 July 1997

*appeal no. 12/97*

*situation report no. 1*

*period covered: 14-21 July 1997*

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*The worst floods to hit Central and Eastern Europe this century have caused at least CHF 7 billion worth of damage, and taken over 100 lives. The capacities of the Czech, Polish, Hungarian and Slovakian Red Cross Societies were further stretched over the weekend when renewed heavy rains added to the chaos. A swift donor response is of paramount importance, to enable the Red Cross to bring relief to the hundreds of thousands affected.*

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## ***The context***

In the worst flooding to hit Central and Eastern Europe this century, damage and destruction to buildings, roads, agricultural land, communications and infrastructure have affected over one million people and caused damages of over CHF 7 billion. Freak weather conditions — heavy rains, hailstorms and high winds — have led to serious flooding, population evacuation and widespread material damage. Amongst the worst hit areas are Southwest Poland, the Czech Republic, northern Slovakia and Northeast Hungary. Over 100 fatalities have been reported over the past two weeks.

In response to the disaster the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies launched an Emergency Appeal (No. 12/97) on 14 July, seeking CHF 6,960,000 in cash, kind and services to assist 257,000 beneficiaries for one month in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary.

## ***Latest events***

Torrential rains continued relentlessly over the weekend of 19-20 July.

In Poland, the Oder river continues to swell, threatening a number of towns and villages on the Polish/German border which have so far avoided serious flood damage. A second wave of flood

water is expected to hit the already devastated region in southern Poland within the next few days, with the major city of Wroclaw braced for further deluges on 21-22 July. Advancing northwards, the floods are expected to reach Szczecin by the middle of the week. In the southwest of the country, evacuations continued over the weekend, with 50 families leaving villages threatened in the mountainous region. The Polish government is mobilising civil and defence units to create effective communication lines in the areas affected and to help local populations prepare for the expected second wave. To date some 132,000 people have been evacuated from their homes. Animal stocks and farmland have also suffered from the flooding, threatening the livelihood of millions.

In the Czech Republic continuing rain over the weekend further affected north eastern Bohemia, southern Moravia and land along the Polish/Czech border, resulting in the evacuation of a further two towns along the Oder and Morava rivers. On Sunday 20 July, a state of emergency was declared in Ostrava, the third largest city in the industrial heartland of the Czech Republic, with a population of 300,000. Ecological damage threatens in some districts, as oil and chemicals from damaged containers and storage tanks escape into the rivers. Production in the mining and steel industries, which are concentrated in the flooded areas, has also been severely affected, as communication and transportation lines are cut.

Although water levels have stabilised to a certain degree in some parts of Slovakia, a further 110 families were evacuated over the weekend from villages in the Zenica region in the west of the country. Further damage can be expected if the situation in southern Moravia in the neighbouring Czech Republic worsens. The water level in the Danube is also expected to rise near the Slovak capital, Bratislava, although flooding is not expected to reach residential areas. In Hungary, where water levels along the river Danube are rising steadily, flood warnings have been issued in the north and northwest of the country. As rain is expected from the end of the week, another flood wave could pass through Hungary next week.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent Action***

### **Polish Red Cross •**

Staff and volunteers of local branches of the Polish Red Cross are involved in the packaging and distribution of emergency aid items to victims of the floods. Evacuees accommodated in provisional shelters, and those who have stayed behind in flooded districts, are being provided with food and hygiene items, blankets, bed sheets and detergent. As gas and electricity lines have been cut food must be provided in a 'ready-to-eat' form.

### **Czech Red Cross •**

The Czech Red Cross is continuing to purchase supplies locally, for transportation to the regions affected. Food and hygiene items, blankets, bed sheets and detergent are being distributed by local Red Cross staff and volunteers, co-operating with local crisis staff committees and local authorities. Priority is being given to distribution to hospitals, social institutions, homes for the elderly and children's homes, as well as evacuation centres, where hot meals are prepared for the flood victims. Drinking water tanks have been provided in villages and towns which are still accessible by road.

### **Slovak Red Cross •**

The distribution of 100 life saving jackets to rescue teams involved in the evacuation of citizens has been completed. The National Society is now involved in preparations for the distribution of drinking water and baby food parcels.

### **Hungarian Red Cross •**

The Hungarian Red Cross has been involved in extensive damage assessment and evaluation and has been preparing for the distribution of food, hygiene parcels and blankets in the north of the country.

**ERUs •**

German and Austrian Red Cross Emergency Response Units (Water Purification) are operating in the affected areas.

## ***Outstanding needs***

Although flood waters may start to retreat over the next few days in certain areas, other districts, particularly in the north and in the southwest of Poland, are bracing themselves for a second wave of flooding. The number of people affected is likely to increase further before water levels reduce.

As it will be some time before evacuees will be able to return to their homes, and repairs to electricity, gas and telecommunications lines cannot be made before water levels are reduced, the cooking and heating capacity of hundreds of thousands of families has been limited. Forced to flee their homes without essential food, hygiene and bedding items, it is vital that emergency food, water and hygiene aid continues to be distributed to those affected: both in evacuation centres and those remaining in flooded districts.

The extent of the flood damage is enormous, in terms of houses, roads, communication lines, agricultural land and livestock. As water levels subside the full extent will become even more obvious, and the extensive process of cleaning up will have to begin.

## ***External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media***

The National Societies have been working in close co-operation with their governments, local authorities and civil defence units to bring urgent relief to the victims of the floods. National Appeals have been launched in the Czech Republic and Slovakia for cash and in-kind assistance, and the National Societies have been involved in co-ordinating distribution of this relief. The floods, and the Red Cross efforts to combat their affect, have been well covered by local and international media.

## ***Contributions***

See Annex 1 for details.

## ***Conclusion***

Needs continue to mount in this tragedy. A prompt and generous response from donors is urged, to allow the immediate food and sanitation needs of the affected be met, and to ensure a thorough clean-up and rehabilitation operation when flood waters eventually recede. For more details, please contact Leopoldo Principe, Desk Officer on ++4122 7304319.

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