

# OPERATIONS UPDATE



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

## **SYRIA (HAMAH REGION):DAM COLLAPSE/FLOODING**

11 June 2002

*The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilising the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in 178 countries. For more information: [www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)*

*Appeal No. 15/02*

*Launched on 6 June 2002 for CHF 581,000 for 1 month for 8,000 beneficiaries*

*Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) Allocated: CHF 200,000*

*Operations Update No. 1 ; Period covered: 6 June-10 June 2002*

### **IN BRIEF**

*Appeal coverage: 0.0%; Note that this figure does not yet reflect pledges from the American and Canadian Red Cross Societies, the Libyan Red Crescent Society or goods in kind from the Turkish and UAE Red Crescent Societies.*

*Related Appeals: 01.58/2002; PRCS: Lebanon/Syria branches*

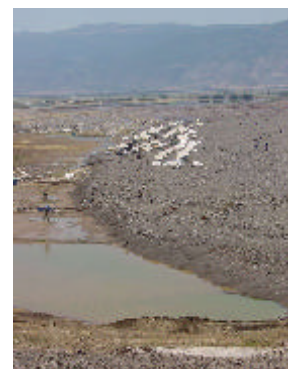
*Outstanding needs: CHF 581,000 (USD 370,000/EUR 395,000)*

*Summary: Volunteers and staff of the Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society were among the first to reach the disaster area. About 10 volunteers from the Hamah branch, 100 kilometers northeast of the dam, immediately distributed food to the victims and erected 50 tents to shelter families who had come back to the village and refused to leave. Other volunteers from Damascus, Sweida and Deir Ezzour joined Hamah branch volunteers the day after. There remains a tremendous need for urgently required relief items for the families who lost everything they owned to the flooding.*

### **Operational Developments w**

The 43-metre high, 5-kilometer wide Zeyoun dam, close to Hamah in northwest Syria, burst at around 15h00 on 4 June creating a breach of about 100 metres which 70 million cubic metres of water rushed through. The flooding completely destroyed one village, Zeyoun, and caused heavy damage to five others; Al-Ziyara, Msheek, Tal-Waseet, Jisr al Chour and Qarqoor.

The 1,000 person village of Zeyoun directly faced the breach in the dam, and was situated approximately one hundred metres away. Zeyoun was evacuated minutes before the dam burst, as people saw the increasingly visible leakage in the dam wall. Houses, cattle, water pumps and vehicles, as well as all other belongings were swept away. Within minutes the water reached the other villages 6-8 kilometers away, killing at least 20 people, some of whom were working in the fields at the time. Homes were flooded by as much as four metres of water, and





some 10,000 people were affected in neighboring villages of Mchit, Tell Wassat, Karkour, Jisr al Chour and Karkour.

The majority of the population of these surrounding villages lost most of their belongings. Furniture, clothes, electrical appliances, mattresses etc. were rendered completely useless by floodwater and layers of mud. The destructive path stopped only when the water poured in the Oronte River about 14 kilometers away. It is estimated that 50% of the houses in Al-Ziyarah and Msheek were destroyed. All household items, in every single house of the village, were damaged beyond repair. Over 30% of Karkour’s houses were destroyed, and all household items damaged. In Tal-Waset, the damage was less extensive but none the less substantial

to some houses.

Crops were totally or partially damaged depending on their location. Crops on higher grounds were saved. Up to 10,000 hectares of irrigated land were submerged under water. Water pumps, irrigation pipes and tools and livestock were swept away by flood waters. Roads, electricity, water and sanitation infrastructure, and telecommunications lines have been disrupted. However, all villages in the area, including the Zeyoun camp site, are still accessible by regular vehicles.

**Coordination w**

The Syrian government is seeking international assistance through organizations such as the UN which has sent an UNDAC team into the area. The government is providing initial compensation to victims: families of those who died will receive 50,000 Syrian pounds (CHF 2,400); and those with damaged houses will receive 10,000 Syrian pounds (CHF 480). Food, tents and blankets have been distributed.

A “clean up” operation commenced in damaged villages. Civil defense, water and electricity crews, bulldozers, and other equipment were deployed to assist with the efforts. Electricity was established in the Zaizon camp. An Emergency Operations Room (EOR) has been active in the area, and relief assistance warehouses were also established nearby.

During the first few days the overall response lacked coordination. Quantities of support in some areas were not adequate, particularly water which seems to be a lingering problem.

Problems such as the lack of clarity of a well-established role for the Syrian Arab Red Crescent Society (SARCS) in the overall regional plan, and some difficulties of branch coordination, coupled with the lack of hazard and/or vulnerability maps of the area were obstacles during the first two days of the dam collapse. However most of the management and coordination issues were solved quickly, especially with the EOR. The Hamah branch has taken the main role because all affected village are within the Hamah borders. Board members of the Hamah branch are in charge of managing the camp assisted by an adequate number of volunteers (most volunteers are students who are currently passing their year end exams). Each day a board member goes to the site, and stays there until the end of the day, when s/he writes a full report of the day’s activities, achievements, problems and next day’s needs.



**Red Cross and Red Crescent action w**

Volunteers and staff of the SARCS were among the first to reach the disaster area. About 10 volunteers from the Hamah branch, 100 kilometers northeast of the dam immediately distributed food to the victims and erected 50 tents to shelter families who had come back to the village and refused to leave. Other volunteers from

Damascus, Sweida and Deir Ezzour joined Hamah branch volunteers the day after. A tent warehouse was established to receive assistance coming from SARCS, the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent Society and the Turkish Red Crescent Society. Additional tents, blankets, jerry cans and kitchen utensils were also distributed to victims.

The number of volunteers peaked to about 50 at the Zeyoun disaster site, among them were three medical doctors, an ambulance and a few support vehicles. The Hamah branch is planning to expand its area of operations to include Al-Ziyara and Msheek the other two heavily affected villages. All these activities are coordinated closely with the local Relief Committee established by the government. After meetings and discussions between the SARCS and the Emergency Operations Room (EOR), it was decided that management of the Zeyoun camp will be left completely to the SARCS due to the excellent rapport the volunteers have struck with the victims. A representative of the EOR will also move to the camp to reside there until further notice.

The Turkish Red Crescent Society is sending the following:

- 200 tents;
- 1,000 blankets;
- 3 MT rice;
- 3 MT sugar;
- 3 MT oil;
- 3 MT dry biscuits;
- Medical supplies.

The UAE Red Crescent Society has sent two planes with:

- Medical Items
- 2000 blankets
- 100 tents
- miscellaneous relief goods

Donations of relief items have arrived from Iraq, Morocco and the UAE. All National Societies are urged to respect and adhere to the “Principles of Red Cross Disaster Response.”

Two days after the disaster the Federation’s Regional delegation sent an assessment team consisting of a health delegate, information officer and a representative of the French Red Cross. The team was able to visit all sites of the disaster and meet with victims, villagers, as well as the governor to assess the situation firsthand. The enthusiastic reception of the team reinforces and underlines the coordinating role the Federation could potentially assume through the Regional Delegation.

### **Red Cross and Red Crescent Society w**

The SARC has assumed a lead role, with strong support provided from the Federation’s Regional delegation and the Secretariat, and with continued financial and material support from sister societies will be able to meet their commitments.

### **Objectives, activities and results w**

#### **Health and care w**

There is no immediate action required regarding primary health care services, but SARCS volunteers may be a good resource to provide support to the villagers in areas such as health promotion, teaching them how to cope with sudden change and loss, and psychological support. The government has assumed responsibility for water-sanitation issues.

#### **Water and sanitation w**

Even though government teams have been working on repairing the water system, an adequate supply of drinking water continues to be a problem. This was mentioned by almost all victims interviewed by the regional assessment team.

#### **Relief distribution of food and basic non-food items w**

- Immediate distribution of energy food (no cooking required): tinned food; sardines, meat, jam, yoghurt, halva, and cheese;
- fuel and cooking stoves;
- kitchen utensils, jerry cans;
- sugar, tea, bulgar, wheat, oil, rice, lentils etc;
- clothes (to be purchased locally);
- slippers

#### **Shelter w**

Affected families are being provided with:

- foam mattresses;
- blankets;
- pillows;
- tents.

#### **National Society Capacity Building w**

The Hamah branch has limited capacity to handle the situation without support. The number of active volunteers is very small. Transport is borrowed from the Ministry of Health. So far, they have been able to cope through the involvement of volunteers from other branches. The Federation team recommendation is that the headquarters of SARCS appoints a full time coordinator for the relief and logistics efforts. This has been done. The Federation has appointed a Regional Delegate with a suitable background to assist the coordinator and the Hamah branch. This is an important contribution to the capacity building process of the National Society in Disaster Preparedness and Management which was already started with the Federation some months ago.

#### **Federation Delegation w**

As noted earlier, the Federation's Regional Delegation will continue to act as the field co-ordinator reporting to the Head of Operations and MENA department in Geneva. The Head of Operations will lead Geneva coordination for the mean time.

#### **Advocacy/Public Information w**

The SARCS requested that the Regional Delegation send an information delegate on a temporary basis to assist the national society with gathering more media coverage of their relief activities.



#### **Outstanding needs w**

Relief items identified below can be procured easily in Damascus.

Donors, therefore, are urged to provide cash to enable the Federation to carry out local procurement, promote coordination and allow closer management of needs and distributions.

- **Transport:** one vehicle for the Hamah branch.
- **Logistics:** rental of warehouse in Hamah. (An alternative is to utilise warehouses being currently used by the EOR near the site which is currently provided to the SARCS free of charge.
- **Personnel:** Regional Delegation to send one person (one month) to assist until a suitable delegate is found. A local relief coordinator. 15 volunteers on continuous basis.
- **Temporary Shelter:** tents
- **Safe water/sanitation:** Drinking water.
- **Communications-**mobile telephones for the branch; relief coordinator; and, delegate.
- **Food:** energy foods which need no cooking:tinned food; sardines, meat, jam, yoghurt, halva, cheese, sugar, tea, bulgar, wheat flour, oil, rice, lentils.

- **Domestic Items:** blankets, mattresses, pillows, kitchen utensils, jerry cans, kerosine stoves, hygiene kits: soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrushes, shaving equipment, napkins for women and children and locally purchased clothes and slippers for women, men and children.
- **Long term:** seeds, tools for agriculture for the rainy season.

*For further details please contact: Evgeni Parfenov, Phone: 41 22 730 4325; Fax: 41 22 733 03 95; email: parfenov@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. This operation seeks to administer to the immediate requirements of the victims of this disaster. Subsequent operations to promote sustainable development or longer-term capacity building will require additional support, and these programmes are outlined on the Federation's website. For further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>.*

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