

INDONESIA: HAZE/SMOG

*1 December
1997*

appeal no. 18/97

situation report no. 1

period covered: 3 November - 27 November 1997

The smog/haze that has choked much of south east Asia is clearing with the belated arrival of the monsoon. The Indonesian Red Cross is preparing to launch a health education campaign and a poster on preventive measures in affected areas .

The context

A long delay of monsoon rains in South East Asia has brought a widespread drought to Indonesia and other parts of the region. Extensive land clearance, under tinderbox conditions, has led to gigantic forest fires in Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Java and Irian Jaya. The huge amount of smog/haze these fires have produced constituted an environmental emergency in the region which could have a long term health effect on the population, especially small children, in the affected areas.

An international appeal for CHF 265,000 was launched in early November to assist the Indonesian Red Cross Society (PMI) in carrying out a health education campaign to the general population on protection against smoke and haze and on safe water and sanitation; providing advice to affected families on longer term care for persons with respiratory ailments; continuous monitoring the health and food situation in affected communities and early warning into the next dry season. The Red Cross objective is to safeguard the health of vulnerable groups during episodes of drought and forest fires through the mobilisation and training of PMI volunteers in sensitising and educating those affected.

Latest events

The smoky haze that has choked much of South East Asia is clearing, now that the Northeast monsoon season, bringing rains from November to late February to countries worst-affected by the haze, has finally begun. Recent satellite photos show very few hot spots in Indonesia, which also explains air improvement.

To start the implementation of this operation the International Federation released CHF 50,000 from its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF).

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

The PMI, in accordance with the Plan of Action in the appeal, has taken the following preparatory measures:

Training of Trainers

The training of trainers relies on a multiplier effect: trainers will in turn train volunteers in the branches who will train village health cadres. Six training courses will be conducted in Sumatra and Kalimantan. The following training courses will take place in December, although only the first one has a definite schedule so far:

- a. Date : 8-12 December 1997
 Venue : Pekanbaru, Riau
 No. of chapters
 represented : 2 (Riau and West Sumatra)
 No. of branches : 22

Programme :

- 1st day - meeting of chapter secretaries for information dissemination
 2nd-4th day - training of trainers
 5th day - field practice

- b. Date 22-24 December
 Venue South Kalimantan.

- c. In January, training will take place in South Sumatra with the chapters of Lampung, Jambi and South Sumatra participating. The date is still to be set as the Moslem fast of Ramadan will occur in January.

Health education materials

Miniposters for mass distribution will be printed soon. They contain simple information for household level prevention measures and environmental control. Two of three scheduled leaflets are ready. The poster for a campaign explaining prevention measures is in production.

Co-ordination

There has been good co-ordination between Red Cross and the Ministries of Health and of Education and the local government units in this health advice and education project to ensure that it reaches as many of the population as possible, including schoolchildren.

Other activities

Three chapters in the affected areas -- South Sumatra, West Sumatra and Riau -- are actively co-ordinating with the Ministry of Health in the provision of medicines and of volunteers to assist the Ministry.

Four hundred thousand face masks were distributed in October in nine provinces -- West, East, South and Central Kalimantan and Jambi, Lampung, Riau, South and West Sumatra .

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The PMI is working with the relevant Indonesian government departments to implement this operation in the targeted areas. Red Cross activities continue to enjoy media coverage and support.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details. Thanks to support from the Australian government (through AusAID) and cash contributions from the German and Japanese Red Cross Societies, this appeal has been fully covered.

Conclusion

Although air conditions in the South East Asia have improved substantially due to the belated onset of the monsoon season, continued monitoring of the health situation of the affected population is still essential. The information collected will help cope with any future similar emergencies in the region. The International Federation will keep NS informed of this unique operation as it develops.

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