

# **PAPUA NEW GUINEA: DISPLACED PERSONS**

8 April, 1997

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*situation report no. 1*

*period covered: November 1996 - March 1997*

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*Against a background of political crisis at the national level and difficult security conditions on Bougainville island, the Federation/Papua New Guinea relief operation got under way in February. Distributions of family packs have been made to more than 1,600 families and other relief items and medical supplies have been provided. A second shipment of 6,000 family packs to Arawa, Bougainville's main town, is being readied, bringing the total delivered to 12,000 packs -- enough for practically every family on the island.*

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## ***The context***

After more than eight years of fighting on the Papua New Guinea island of Bougainville prospects of a resolution of the conflict in the near future remain dim. The Papua New Guinea (PNG) government have gradually closed down government controlled care centres for displaced persons and encouraged displaced civilians to return to their home villages. The current appeal is intended to help the people of Bougainville back to a normal life.

In the last few months of 1996 and in January and early February this year, the outlook for the planned relief activities looked bright, but financial constraints delayed the beginning of the operation.

From mid-February onwards, shoot-outs between the Papua New Guinea Defence Force and Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) rebels became more frequent and security was tightened.

## ***Latest events***

In February, the revelation that the PNG government had hired mercenaries for its operations on Bougainville triggered a major political crisis. Opposition came from both the PNG military and the general public. In a confrontation with the armed forces, the government was forced to send the mercenaries packing, but retaliated by replacing the popular military commander. In protest, people took to the streets in all main towns, and looting and clashes with the police ensued. Faced

with the growing unrest, which culminated in a night-long siege of Parliament, the Prime Minister and two other Ministers finally stepped aside. An acting Prime Minister was named and a commission of enquiry appointed, enabling a return to normality.

At the height of the crisis all commercial flights to Bougainville were suspended and the island was completely cut off.

In February the government prolonged the existence of the Bougainville Transitional Government (BTG) in order to maintain the momentum of peace efforts. A Strategic Plan for the peace process and the development of Bougainville is nearly finished and is expected to go before Parliament shortly. These positive developments were, however, totally overshadowed by the mercenary crisis.

March brought Papua New Guinea its worst natural disaster in 22 years of independence. Cyclone Justin, almost stationary in the Coral Sea, caused huge destruction of houses, livestock, plantations and some loss of life along the coastline of PNG islands. Most of the damaged areas were inaccessible and authorities as well as the Federation are still awaiting damage reports. The cyclone damage was, however, forced out of the headlines by the political events.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent action***

Federation staff collected comprehensive data on 4,486 families (21,759 persons) in the Central/Kieta area of Bougainville, prior to the start of distributions.

All relief supplies were purchased on the main island of PNG. To transport them to Loloho, a small harbour a few kilometres from Arawa, the main town on Bougainville, the PNGRCS/Federation chartered a front loading barge which arrived in Loloho on 11 February. The ship was unloaded by 15 February and the cargo of 72 drums of fuel, 6,000 family packs of relief goods and bulk relief goods was transferred to the Federation's warehouse in Arawa by a Red Cross truck and three other hired trucks.

On 15 February, the Federation Relief Delegate was ambushed by 20 heavily armed men. There was heavy shooting and the vehicle was seized. The local population and the chiefs were informed of the incident. The vehicle was returned by villagers the same day, partially stripped. The relief operation was put on hold until security guarantees for safe passage were renewed.

Due to the political insecurity caused by the mercenaries crisis and the rising tension on Bougainville, all helicopter flights were cancelled on 20 February. The Federation Delegate and PNGRCS staff left Arawa on the last flight out, leaving two local staff in Arawa to control stocks and assets. They returned on 21 March, the first day flights resumed.

In Port Moresby, preparations were made for the purchase and shipment of the second lot of 6,000 family packs. The shipment is expected to arrive in Bougainville in the first week of May.

### **Distribution •**

In the first distribution in February, 115 families received the family packs, and 427 individuals received assistance from bulk supplies. Family packs consist of blankets, clothing for a family, cooking pots, plates and utensils and gardening tools. Bulk supplies consist of individual items, such as tools, that are handed out to replace broken or worn out items.

The second round of distributions started on 24 March and continued through 31 March. The Federation managed to distribute supplies to 1,499 families or 6,861 persons in this short span of time under difficult conditions.

Months	Family packs	No. of families	Males	Females	Boys	Girls
February	115	115	92	108	63	61
March	1499	1499	2309	2204	1241	1107
<b>Total</b>	1614	1614	2401	2312	1304	1168

#### **Health •**

The health situation in all surveyed areas of Bougainville remains above the PNG average. No malnutrition cases were reported. Nine medivacs were made available to and from Sohano Hospital on the island of Buka, using surplus pay load in Red Cross chartered helicopters. Two health posts were supplied with medical kits containing drugs for three months.

## ***Outstanding needs***

A Relief Co-ordinator and Relief Administrator are still urgently required.

With current pledges, and notably the pledge of AUD 4,000,000 from Australian Aid through the Australian Red Cross, the operation on Bougainville is now fully covered. However, the component covering support to the Solomon Islands Red Cross relief programme is only financed up to June. If this part of the operation is to be extended, more funding must be found.

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

The Federation has all the required clearances for operating in Bougainville from the Commander of the Defence Force and the Chief of Staff. However, despite these assurances, the military on the island often restrict Federation movements, making it difficult to ensure that distributions take place in all areas.

The Federation has clearances from the BRA to operate in all areas under their control apart from special combat zones.

## ***Contributions***

See Annex 1.

## ***Conclusion***

The relief operation is now in full swing. Depending on security, distributions are expected to be completed during the next four months. Security on Bougainville remains an issue, adding to the complexity of the logistics and making it crucial to staff the operation with highly experienced and qualified delegates.

In addition, the relief operation is providing the Federation with the opportunity of assisting the PNGRCS in its development, particularly in the area of the dissemination of information on the Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement and its Principles.

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