

VENEZUELA: FLOODS

*24th December
1999*

appeal no. 35/99

situation report no. 2

period covered: 23-24 December 1999

The size and the scope of this disaster remains overwhelming. Relief and rescue activities remain the focus while assessments are underway which will form the basis of the upcoming full appeal. Coordination efforts are taking place and the donor response and support has been positive, but there remain many outstanding needs.

The context

Two weeks of unrelenting rain led to flash flooding and landslides in northern Venezuela and on December 16, the Government of Venezuela declared a state of emergency for the States of Vargas, Zulia, Falcon, Yaracuz, Nueva Esparta, Carabobo, Tachira and Miranda, and the Federal District of Caracas. Two weeks after rains unleashed devastating floods, the relief effort in Venezuela has shifted to recovering bodies, avoiding epidemics and finding homes for 150,000 people. Up to 30,000 are feared dead in the floods and mudslides and up to 250,000 are thought to be directly or indirectly affected. The disaster is likely to rank among Latin America's worst of the century. The State of Vargas is considered the hardest-hit. The Caracas-La Guaira highway is closed to all but humanitarian vehicles, and the coastal roads are almost completely destroyed.

Latest events

The Venezuelan government has announced its intention to construct 25,000 new houses by June 2000 for those who have been made homeless by the disaster. In the meantime, those affected will be moved out of temporary shelters and into medium term accommodation, such as military bases. However, some of the internally displaced are choosing instead to move to those states which have not been affected by the disaster, whilst others have decided not to move from their homes, even though they are located in the disaster zone.

It has been reported that the office of the La Guaira chapter of the VRC has been completely destroyed, and the president and vice president of the chapter killed in the disaster.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Venezuelan Red Cross •

In collaboration with the International Federation and Participating National Societies, the Venezuelan Red Cross (VRC) has produced a draft plan of action for those affected by the floods and mudslides.

Immediate actions (up until 1st January 2000) will include the continued rescue and relief operations, and the distribution of relief items donated by, inter alia, other National Societies and governments, to the internally displaced and other victims of the disaster. The VRC will also complete a needs assessment in the affected states.

In the beginning of January, the Society will commence the next phase of its operations, focusing on distribution of relief items, family reunification, community development, psychological support, developing communal water supplies and primary health care. It is envisaged that this phase will last approximately 3 months, and the rehabilitation phase will start in April 2000.

International Federation •

The International Federation team now has a full team of eleven delegates on the ground and is ready to begin comprehensive needs assessments and logistic operations. The team includes six personnel from the Colombian, Costa Rican, Ecuadorian, Mexican and Peruvian Red Cross Societies and is supported by ten volunteers, who are mainly working in the area of information.

The Secretary General of the International Federation and the Director of the Americas Department, are leaving for Caracas on 26 December.

Relief distributions •

The VRC has distributed over 25 tonnes of relief items over the last days, mostly comfort kits donated by the American Red Cross. The focus of the distributions has been the State of Vargas, which was the worst affected by the disaster. A further truckload of Christmas gifts has been distributed today to affected communities.

Logistics •

The Federation logistics coordinator is arriving in Caracas today. The Federation and VRC are currently considering two offers of warehouses to assist the logistics operation.

A Federation logistics base is being established in Panama which will coordinate all supplies and procurement. The Head of the Logistics Department in Geneva is leaving for Panama on 26 December to work with a Federation logistics delegate and the Panamanian Red Cross in setting up the logistics cell.

Health •

The Federation health delegate has carried out an evaluation in the shelters in Valencia where approximately 12,000 people are accommodated. On 26 December, a meeting will take place with the VRC health directors to develop a comprehensive plan of action for addressing the needs of the affected population.

Water and sanitation •

A water and sanitation assessment will take place over the next two weeks, led by a German Red Cross delegate and assisted by a water and sanitation technician from the French Red Cross who is due to arrive in Caracas on 26 December. The Spanish Red Cross have confirmed that they will provide 15 small drinking water units, and the French Red Cross are contributing eight water treatment stations. A German water and sanitation delegate has been sent to Peru where an ERU is on standby.

Tracing •

Four Colombian Red Cross volunteers are assisting the VRC in establishing the tracing service. To date, the VRC has received over 5,000 tracing requests via an emergency telephone line. The number is 1-800-27652.

Telecommunications •

The Colombian Red Cross has sent a telecoms engineer who is currently working to build up the telecoms infrastructure. In order to facilitate communications, the Federation team are being provided with two satellite phones. The logistics centre in Panama will have a further satellite phone.

Participating National Societies

British Red Cross - A British Red Cross flight has arrived with a cargo of plastic sheeting. A further flight transporting collapsible jerry cans, which are difficult to procure in the region, is scheduled for next week.

Danish Red Cross - With funding from the Danish government, the Danish Red Cross is organizing a flight with 20,000 blankets for the relief effort.

Spanish Red Cross - The Spanish Red Cross delegate has been meeting with the authorities in Caracas in preparation for the arrival of five further delegates on 27 December.

American Red Cross - The American Red Cross currently has ten delegates on the ground and has been carrying out a needs assessment in two areas in Vargas and one in Falcon.

Outstanding needs

Needs assessments are currently underway. The needs expressed in the appeal remain valid. x% of the appeal target remains uncovered.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

During his 3 day visit, the International Federation secretary general is due to meet with high level representatives of the Venezuelan Government.

Federation delegates in the field have been coordinating with representatives from PAHO and OCHA. In Geneva, a representative from the Federation Secretariat in Geneva has participated in an information meeting of UN agencies convened by OCHA.

Numerous interviews and briefings have been held with the international media. Comprehensive coverage of the VRC plan of action was provided today by the BBC.

Contributions

In addition to those contributions listed in annex 1, the International Federation has received the following donations: Australian Government: AUD 100,000; Australian Red Cross: AUD 20,000; Canadian Red Cross/CIDA: CAN 100,000; Italian Red Cross: LIT 100,000,000; Japanese Red Cross: CHF 150,000. With these contributions, just over half of the appeal total has been covered. The list of contributions will be updated fully in the next situation report.

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