

# ***VENEZUELA: FLOODS***

*29 December 1999*

*appeal no. 35/99  
situation report no. 4  
period covered: 27-28 December*

---

*Over 70% of the International Federation's preliminary appeal has been covered. Latest results from the ongoing assessment in the field indicate that the critical needs are still far from being covered. Most of the affected population is still in a transitory phase. Relief flights are arriving in the country on a daily basis. The primary focus is on supporting the Venezuela Red Cross (VRC) in the distribution of basic relief material. The Secretary General of the International Federation, Mr. George Weber, completed a two day trip to the country during which he held meetings with the President of the country and other authorities.*

---

## ***The disaster***

Eleven days of continuous rainfall in Venezuela from December 8 to 19 provoked serious flooding and landslides in the Federal District of Caracas, as well as in the States of Miranda, Vargas, Nueva Esparta (the island of Margarita), Yaracuy, Falcon, Carabobo, Zulia and Tachira. The downpour caused rivers to overflow their banks, sweeping through poor districts in the capital of Caracas. Thousands of homes were destroyed, and streets were turned into fields of thick mud strewn with tree trunks, rocks and boulders. The worst hit areas in the capital were those with shantytowns perched precariously on steep mountainsides where one third of the residents live. Entire communities located on coastal valleys were destroyed or have disappeared in the mass of mud which shifted from the mountains to the coast.

Although the official death toll is still very low, the media and other unofficial sources estimate up to 50,000 deaths. Over 600,000 persons are estimated to have been directly affected, with close to 64,000 houses damaged and over 23,000 destroyed.

To respond to the situation, the International Federation launched a Preliminary Appeal seeking CHF 4,460,000 to support 50,000 persons for 90 days.

## ***Update***

Although search and rescue activities continue throughout the affected area, cleaning up efforts of the access routes are increasing. It is estimated that the international airport of Caracas will be fully reopened by the end of this week.

A National Emergency Committee has been established under the responsibility of the Ministry of Health, composed of infrastructure, social work and communication sub-committees. Short and long term strategies to respond to the needs of the affected population are being developed. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Venezuelan government has currently received cash and in-kind donations valued at USD 35 million.

Government reports indicate that a total of 286 collective centers have been organized throughout the country, hosting a total of 35,170 persons. Many of these collective centers, particularly in the State of Caracas, are located in schools. The government has indicated the need to relocate the homeless as soon as possible as the school year is due to begin in mid January.

Through a social program developed by the government months ago, a reported 6,000 houses are available throughout the country. The possibility of hosting the affected population in these houses is being evaluated.

A national health alert was launched by the government in order to limit the risk of epidemic outbreaks. An increase of diarrhea cases and respiratory infections have already been reported.

Electricity is slowly being restored throughout the affected area while water systems, in most cases, have not yet been repaired.

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

### **Venezuelan Red Cross w**

Presidents and health directors of 17 local branches met yesterday (28 December) at the VRC headquarters, providing updates on their activities in response to the emergency, and elaborating on their plans for future action to be coordinated with the VRC headquarters, the Federation, and Participating Red Cross National Societies (PNS).

Over 1,500 victims were assisted in the Society's first-aid posts set up in Caraballeda and Las Tunitas (State of Vargas) during the first days of the disasters. 500 people were assisted at the Red Cross hospitals in Caracas, Barquisimeto, Puerto Cabello and Maracay. Four VRC first-aid posts are currently working in Vargas. Medical teams continue supporting the affected population in some of the collective centers set up throughout the country, mainly providing psychological counseling.

Although the demand is decreasing, the "family linking" phone line is still functioning and run by more than 30 volunteers.

### **International Federation w**

The Federation's Secretary General, Mr. George Weber, accompanied by the Federation's Director of the Americas Department, Mr. Santiago Gil, paid a two-day visit to the country. After traveling throughout the affected area, meetings were held with the Federation's delegates and PNS representatives. The Secretary General, together with Mr. Mario Villaroel, President of the VRC, met the President of the country, the Ministers of Defense, Foreign Affairs, and Health, as well as the Canadian Ambassador.

A team of 19 delegates is in the country supporting the VRC in the areas of relief, health, telecommunications, reporting, information and family linking. A water and sanitation delegate is expected to arrive in the coming days. Field delegates have been assigned to cover the States of Falcon, Vargas, Valencia, Zulia and Miranda. The global assessment in the country will serve as the basis for the full Appeal expected in the early part of January, 2000.

*Search and rescue:* the Dominican Red Cross rescue team has completed its operation. After 7 days of work in the State of Vargas 31 bodies have been recovered. A final report and evaluation of their mission has been prepared and shared with the VRC and International Federation.

*Relief distributions:* the International Federation relief team continues supporting the VRC in the distribution of goods. 180 mt of relief goods have been distributed to date.

*Health:* the Ministry of Health has issued a list of required medicines, much in line with the WHO's New Emergency Health Kits (NEHK).

In consultation with PNS's and in support to the Venezuelan Red Cross, a rapid health needs assessment has been carried by the Regional Health Delegate, highlighting priority areas in the temporary shelters as well as in flood affected areas in general. The overall objective is to generate support in the communities, with direct interventions in health education, preventive health and mobile clinics. Safe water and restored sanitation is imperative, and a detailed needs assessment is underway. Food security is of major concern, as well as psychological support where the American and Mexican Red Cross' Societies will start up programmes.

Epidemiological surveillance and vector control are also priority areas to prevent outbreaks of cholera, malaria, dengue and other epidemics.

*Water and sanitation:* The water and sanitation delegate has arrived in Caracas this morning (29 December) to undertake a general assessment, as well as to provide assistance to the VRC on the proposal for the provision of water supplies to 50 villages. The delegate will also advise on the suitability of ERUs. The French Red Cross water and sanitation technician, who has been in Caracas for 3 days, will work with the Federation delegate on site selection for the 8 mobile water treatment units being sent from the French Red Cross. Each of the units can produce 20,000 litres of water per day. The Spanish Red Cross will send 16 mobile units in January, each of which can produce 10,000 litres per day. 19 water testing kits have also been distributed to the branches. Specifications for purification tablets and powder have been sent to the Federation logistics cell in Panama for procurement.

*Family Linking Programme:* From a total of 6,000 requests received, a total 113 have been resolved. Five collective centers in Caracas city were visited by the team.

*Telecommunications:* A Colombian Red Cross delegate was sent to Venezuela at the request of the Regional Delegation in Guatemala and has made an initial assessment of the radio communication needs of the VRC. A draft programme and plan of action has been sent to Geneva.

*Logistics:* The Federation Logistics Unit has been established in Panama and has started procurement of basic relief items

#### **Participating National Societies w**

*American Red Cross:* While assessments in the field continue, the ARC team developed an emergency phase distribution plan. Seven 4x4 vehicles will be donated to the VRC in the coming days. 50,000 pounds of relief supplies including one generator, blankets, sheets, water containers, tents and family hygiene kits have arrived. The Society is also shipping 13 tons of calcium hypochlorite, which is due to arrive in Venezuela on January 10.

*Spanish Red Cross:* Two delegates are in the country supporting the VRC's current activities and identifying further projects. They are concentrating their activities in the Miranda and Vargas state. A flight with medicines, water, food and tents has arrived. Two information delegates from the Society have arrived. Four water units are being sent on January 12, and twelve small water plants are expected later from Honduras.

*German Red Cross:* The German Red Cross now has a total of four delegates in Venezuela. Logistics and construction delegates arrived on December 27, and a water and sanitation engineer arrived today. In terms of relief goods, the German Red Cross is sending a vessel with three 4x4 vehicles, bladder tanks, water pumps and 350 family tents. Water cans, basic food items and plastic sheeting is being procured regionally, and the delegates are also arranging the rental of water tankers.

*French Red Cross:* A visit to the State of Vargas was made yesterday. Meetings with the VRC, Federation and PNS were held to jointly coordinate the plan of action in the areas of water sanitation and emergency response. A French Red Cross flight containing various relief items is due to arrive in Venezuela today.

*British Red Cross:* A British Red Cross flight transporting 10,000 jerry cans and 15,000 blankets is due to arrive on January 31. This follows an earlier flight of plastic sheeting sent on December 22nd.

*Danish Red Cross:* A Danish Red Cross aircraft loaded with 24,000 blankets has arrived, and a further 4,000 are in stock ready for transport.

*Colombian Red Cross:* The Colombian Red Cross has also sent a relief flight with mattresses, hygiene kits and food parcels.

## ***Outstanding needs***

The Federation's Logistics Unit located in Panama has started local procurement. The assessment currently underway will indicate specific needs, most of which are expected to be resourced locally in the region. To maintain flexibility in line with any newly identified needs, and pending the launch of the full Appeal, at this point the Federation recommends that the most effective way to support the operation is with cash contributions.

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

The Federation and VRC participate actively in daily coordination meetings with all UN agencies and major NGOs active in Venezuela.

Beginning today (29 December), health and water/sanitation coordination meetings are being organised by WHO.

A press conference took place at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs office during the visit of the Federation's Secretary General. Agencies such as Reuters, AP and over 15 national media were present. Several interviews were provided by the Secretary General, and information on VRC, International Federation and PNS activities and plans in the country was distributed.

Media interest is slowly decreasing, with only sporadic phone interviews and briefings now taking place.

## ***Contributions***

See Annex 1 for details.

Pledge management notes for many in-kind contributions have yet to be received. A fax to concerned National Societies will be issued tomorrow (30 December).

Peter Rees-Gildea  
Director  
Operations Funding and Reporting Department

Santiago Gil,  
Director  
Americas Department