

VENEZUELA: FLOODS

12 January 2000

appeal no. 35/99

situation report no. 6

period covered: 3-9 January 2000

Further rains have caused new floods and landslides and added to the numbers of homeless; weather forecasts predict rain will continue until the end of this month. Following the Federation's updated Emergency Appeal last week, seeking a total of CHF 13,298,000 in cash, kind and services for 50,000 beneficiaries, basic relief goods, chiefly blankets, sanitation equipment and medicines, continue to arrive and a logistics structure is being set up to ensure relief distributions in Vargas, Miranda, Carabobo and Aragua States. Water distribution systems are expanding the numbers reached and quantities distributed. Plans for community health services and psychological support are being developed, in co-operation with local organisations and authorities.

The disaster

Continuous rainfall in Venezuela from 8 to 19 December caused serious flooding and landslides in the Federal District of Caracas and the northern States of Miranda, Vargas, Nueva Esparta (the island of Margarita), Yaracuy, Falcon, Carabobo, Zulia and Tachira. Overflowing rivers swept through poor districts in the capital, Caracas, destroying thousands of homes. In coastal valleys, entire communities disappeared in massive mudslides.

Although the official death toll, based on a body count, is still very low, the media, local authorities and other unofficial sources put the number of dead at between 25,000 and 50,000. An estimated 600,000 persons have been directly affected and, according to the Venezuelan Civil Defense, initial assessments indicate at least 64,700 houses were damaged and over 23,200 destroyed.

Update

Continuing bad weather is creating further devastation and meteorological forecasts indicate the bad weather will continue, probably until the end of January.

A state of emergency was declared in the south west State of Tachira, located at the border with Colombia, some 800 km from Caracas, after two days of heavy rains at the beginning of

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last week caused flooding along the Tachira and La Grita rivers and set off mudslides. The worst affected municipalities were: Pedro María Ureña, Bolívar, Libertad, Independencia and Junin. More than 100 families lost their homes and 1,000 people were moved to local shelters in the state capital, San Antonio. No deaths have been reported. Access routes to the state of Tachira and the main route connecting the city of San Cristobal in Tachira and the Colombian border town of Cucuta have been seriously damaged.

Heavy rains also triggered a landslide on the Caracas-La Guaira highway. The Government evacuated 2,500 people living in communities along the road to the national stadium and military facilities. With the threat of new landslides in the area, it is feared that as many as 200 communities, or a total of 50,000 houses, could be in danger.

Ten thousand people are still being sheltered in schools in Caracas. They will be moved to the Caracas sports stadium, which is being used as a transit shelter, and then relocated to military barracks in the states of Aragua, Carabobo, Anzoategui and Yaracuy in the next few days.

Because of heavy damage to most of the water pipelines, national authorities are still unable to confirm when the water service will be restored in the state of Vargas. The construction of a temporary bridge connecting Caracas and the country's "Eastern Development Pole" in the state of Miranda has been held up by heavy rains, but should be completed shortly.

An assessment conducted by the State of Vargas, updating demographic information and reviewing the social and economic situation of flood victims in the state is nearing completion. It will form the basis for a short and long term strategic reconstruction and rehabilitation plan, addressing the areas of public services, urban security, social integration, housing, urban economy and job generation.

The World Bank has given the Venezuelan Government 12,5 million USD to build schools in the affected states. The EU has announced a donation of Euros 3.6 million for aid programmes in the states of Miranda, Vargas and Falcón.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

International Federation w

A team of 21 Federation delegates in Venezuela is supporting the VRC in logistics, finance, relief, health, water and sanitation, telecommunications, reporting and family tracing activities. It includes five delegates who arrived on 10 January: a health co-ordinator delegate, two psychological relief delegates, a logistics delegate and a reporting delegate.

The Federation is carrying out an assessment of affected coastal areas in the state of Vargas and the La Guaira airport (Caracas District), with the support of the Catholic Church, community leaders and volunteers from the Vargas Red Cross local branch. A group of 460 families were located living with host families; a list was sent to the tracing programme.

Relief distributions w

In Quebrada Anauco (Federal District), distributions of food, hygiene and kitchen kits, blankets, mattresses, diapers and folding beds took place, benefiting a total of 230 families.

In Monte Sano (State of Vargas), 152 families received hygiene and food kits.

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In Minas de Baruta (State of Miranda), 20 families received a 38 kg food parcel; hygiene kits, kitchen kits; and water treatment tablets.

Following further floods and mudslides in the state of Tachira on 3 January, the Tachira Red Cross branch volunteers helped distribute relief items to 120 affected families, including plastic sheeting, tents, blankets, hygiene kits, children's clothes and food

Health w

Authorities in the State of Vargas confirmed to the Federation that there were currently no epidemics, the main problems being diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections.

After a visit to clinics and dispensaries in the state of Vargas, the Federation undertook to supply them with medicines. As soon as the necessary medical personnel has been hired and cars purchased, two mobile medical brigades will begin work among affected people in the state.

A total of 24,000 preventive health campaign brochures on cholera, dengue, malaria, and leptospirosis and the protection of drinking water will be available shortly. VRC volunteers will be trained to give health talks in schools and shelters.

Local health coordinators of the Miranda, Puerto Cabello, Valencia Yacuari and Tachira Red Cross branches met on 5 January to review the current needs of the affected population, and select the communities in which VRC will provide health assistance.

Psychological support w

VRC volunteers will be among a group of approximately 80 people taking part in a psychological support programme for children affected by the floods and landslides. Federation delegates will co-ordinate the programme with the VRC.

Logistics

The Federation logistics team is setting up a tracking system for goods arriving in Venezuela in response to the Appeal. It is also evaluating transport and warehouse costs and facilities in different states and outside the country. A plan of action will be developed, with warehouses in Valencia, La Guaira and Federal Districts supplying goods to the eastern and western affected regions, and the Federal District. The logistics unit set up in nearby Panama is being given major operational support by the Panama Red Cross.

Ten containers of food parcels, purchased with a Kuwait Red Crescent contribution, are scheduled to arrive in country at the end of this week.

With the arrival of the Emergency Health Kits, vehicles are needed immediately to carry out the health plan through mobile medical brigades. Purchasing of part of the vehicle requirement has begun.

Water and sanitation

The Federation is supplying 50,000 persons in the State of Vargas with 10 litres per day per person (up from 5 litres a short while ago). Its target is 15 litres per day.

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The Federation water and sanitation delegate has begun addressing the issues of co-ordination, monitoring and implementation of activities. A co-ordination water-sanitation meeting headed by the Federation has just taken place, with the participation of the Spanish, French and German Red Cross Societies and international agencies such as USAID, Oxfam, MSF, and ACH. It was also attended by Hidrocapital, the national water company and representatives of local water boards.

Tracing

A total of 1,250 enquiries, both national and international, have been resolved. A family reunion has also taken place with the support of the tracing team. The American Red Cross is working jointly on this programme with the Federation.

Telecommunications

A VHF and HF radio base has been installed in the Vargas Red Cross branch, and a repeater in a Venezuelan aviation building. A new coastal repeater has also been installed which will increase communications in an east-west direction in the state of Vargas. The Venezuelan Red Cross is applying for a radio frequency. Several radio items will be purchased, among other components, once a full telecommunications needs assessment has been completed.

Participating National Societies (PNS) w

All PNS continue to work in close co-operation with the Federation and the VRC, both in Venezuela and at the Geneva level.

American Red Cross: A meeting has been held with VRC health professionals to discuss a mental health proposal.

The American Red Cross is purchasing food parcels for several thousand affected families. An assessment of needs in the State of Aragua is being carried out. Two ARC delegates are giving support to the tracing programme.

British Red Cross: A British Red Cross flight which arrived Monday delivered 1,000 kitchen sets, 570 blankets and 8 Emergency Health kits, 10 MT of Oxfam wat/san equipment and 4,920 blankets from the Danish Red Cross.

French Red Cross: The Society has started the installation of 16 water tanks (each with a capacity of 10 cubic metres) in communities in the State of Vargas. So far, 6 tanks have been set up (3 in Las Tunitas and 3 in Macuto).

This activity is part of an integrated programme defined by the Society that aims at installing distribution and treatment systems throughout the area. As soon as water-treatment plants have been installed, volunteers will be trained in their correct use and maintenance.

The Society is supporting the German Red Cross water distribution system with one water truck along the Caracas-La Guaira highway.

In addition, the Society will begin distributing relief items such as hygiene kits, blankets and bed linen sets. During the next three months, it plans to distribute 1,600 hygiene kits per month to 8,000 beneficiaries in the State of Aragua.

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German Red Cross: GRC has installed a further 18,000 litre tank in Vargas. Meanwhile, the Spanish Red Cross is supporting German Red Cross water distribution system with two additional water trucks and a donation of 60,000 chlorine tablets. A total of 5 water trucks transport 174,000 litres of water on 3 daily trips to 22 sites. The tanks are located between La Guaira - Maiquetia and Catia La Mar. Currently a total of 27,000 people receive water on a daily basis.

The GRC is coordinating its water distribution system with the National Emergency Committee and the national company, Hidrocapital. An information leaflet on the correct treatment of drinking water will be distributed to beneficiaries.

The GRC has drawn up a food distribution plan coordinated with the Vargas local branch for a total of 2,400 beneficiaries. Food purchases will take place next week and the distribution will start as soon as the census has been completed.

Honduran Red Cross: The Honduran Red Cross has donated USD 2,000 to VRC relief operation. The Society will send medicine, food, clothes, hygiene kits and kitchen items donated by the population in Honduras.

Italian Red Cross: A representative is assessing the Society's involvement in the response to the emergency under the umbrella of the Federation, after an assessment in the State of Vargas.

The Society plans to fly in medical equipment to set up a medical analysis laboratory in Caraballeda (State of Vargas) and a health delegate specialised in tropical medicine and a logistic delegate will arrive in the next few days.

Spanish Red Cross: SRC representatives met with the Miranda Red Cross branch to develop a strategy to assist affected people in Santa Ana (Municipality of Paez). An engineer will be hired to assess damage to houses. SRC representatives also met with the Miranda Governor concerning the Spanish Red Cross water distribution project for the community of Santa Bàrbara in which a group of Spanish NGOs will also participate. Eleven water-treatment plants are expected to arrive next week (3 from Spain and 8 from Honduras).

As part of its food distribution plan, SRC will start purchasing in order to supply 1,000 families in Naiguatà (State of Vargas) and 500 families in the municipality of Paez (State of Miranda) with food items over the next 6 months.

As part of a developing programme of aid to Caracas, 10 water pumps will be purchased and placed in different sites within the Federal District. Blankets and tents will be distributed to the citizens' brigades.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The Federation participates in co-ordination meetings with UN agencies and major NGOs currently working in Venezuela, held every week.

Briefings and interviews were done with several BBC World services on the current situation in the State of Tachira. A Spanish TV station and newspaper were accompanied to the field to

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cover Red Cross distributions. Sporadic phone interviews and briefings are taking place and contacts with international agencies based in the country are maintained.

The VRC and the Federation have prepared a media coverage report and an information plan of action to support the ongoing operation. Two locally recruited persons will strengthen the VRC information department over the coming 6 months. A press-release was issued on the launching last week of the Federation's Emergency Appeal which replaced the preliminary appeal of 20 December 1999. The visit to the VRC of the Secretary General of the Caracas Government received wide press coverage.

Outstanding needs

Because of the importance of the water and sanitation programme in the relief operation and the Federation's co-ordinating role for all Red Cross and NGO activities in this field, a Federation water and sanitation co-ordinator is urgently required. (The Federation/German Red Cross water-sanitation delegate finished her mission last week).

Thanks to recent contributions, the need for medicines and blankets has now been met.

All National Societies are urged to provide advance information and clearance documentation regarding the despatch of relief supplies and the arrival of airlifts so that the Federation can provide effective reception and tracking of in-kind donations.

Contributions

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