

VENEZUELA: FLOODS

20 January 2000

appeal no. 35/99

situation report no. 7

period covered: 12-17 January 2000

In response to the worst disaster Venezuela has experienced in over half a century, a relief operation is underway, backed by an updated Emergency Appeal seeking a total of 13,298, 000 CHF in cash, kind and services to assist 50.000 beneficiaries for 12 months. The Federation's central warehouse is now fully operational and the first large shipment of food items from Panama has arrived, with more emergency supplies and family food parcels in the pipeline.

Water distribution is one of the main activities for all the participating national societies working in the disaster zone. The tracing service has resolved over 1,300 cases. A psychological support service is being developed. Torrential rains over the last three days in the areas of Falcón, Miranda and Carabobo have created operational problems. Civil Defence and Red Cross personnel are on alert for possible new flash flooding.

The disaster

Torrential rainfall in Venezuela from 8 to 19 December caused serious flooding and landslides in the Federal District of Caracas, as well as in the northern States of Miranda, Vargas, Nueva Esparta (the island of Margarita), Yaracuy, Falcon, Carabobo, Zulia and Tachira. The official death toll, originally very low, is rising, as bodies carried out to sea are washed ashore. Unofficial sources are now putting estimates at around 30,000. Over 600,000 persons are estimated to have been directly affected. According to the Venezuelan Civil Defense's initial damage assessments, at least 64,707 houses were damaged and over 23,200 destroyed.

Update

- The Civil Defense reported that as of 14 January, there were 114,388 displaced persons living in 326 military shelters; 5,944 persons have been registered as missing.
- The government is continuing the registration of affected families. It is identifying places for housing developments where it intends to relocate the homeless, but many families are unwilling to move to the provinces.

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- Classes resumed on 10 January in most schools. However, some are still being used for shelters, and others recently vacated were left in poor condition and need repairs. Students from the occupied schools are being relocated to schools in neighbouring states.
- With the holiday season over, people are returning to work only to find themselves without jobs as their work places have closed down or disappeared. The unemployment rate is now 60% in the state of Vargas, where up to 230,000 have lost their jobs.
- Hidroven, the state owned water supply company, has announced that for the next year or two, the east of the State of Vargas will receive its water supply through tanker trucks and raw sewage will be dumped directly into the ocean.
- The La Guaira port, closed since 15 December, has just reopened. The ocean along the coast of the State of Vargas is highly contaminated after toxic chemicals spilled from overturned containers stored near the docks.
- Heavy construction equipment donated by governments is being used around the clock to construct or rehabilitate the main highways as well as secondary roads. Several bridges are too dangerous to use.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Latest emergency developments:

On Monday, 17 January, waves up to 15 metres high hit the coast of Vargas, creating additional landslides and further damaging recently repaired roads. More flooding has occurred along the Falcón coast line, increasing the need for medical services and drinking water in the area. In a middle of the night on 18 January, the contents of the Federation warehouse, located at the foot of steep hills, was moved to higher ground. Torrential rains are predicted for the next few days.

An earthquake with its epicentre in Colombia was felt in Caracas. It created panic in the population but caused no damage. Further stronger tremors could cause problems for the relief efforts.

Venezuelan Red Cross (VRC)w

An extraordinary meeting of the VRC Executive Committee was held on 11 January to inform presidents of VRC branches in the affected states of present and planned assistance under the Federation appeal and of support from participating National Societies. The importance of close liaison, information exchange and coordination between the Branches and the Federation and PNS delegates in their area was emphasized. Federation delegates and American and Netherlands Red Cross representatives also attended.

The VRC has transferred complete control of its central warehouse, a 6,000 m² building in Maracay, to the Federation. A second warehouse, an 8,000 m² building in Valencia, will be managed by the American Red Cross.

An incident in which an armed group forcibly removed supplies from the Federation warehouse was resolved with the help of the VRC Branch in Maracay, but it emphasizes the sensitive security situation related to relief distributions.

The Maracay Red Cross branch has been very active, providing occupational therapy in shelters and giving health talks on dengue and cholera, using brochures on these subjects provided by the Federation.

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International Federation

A census currently under way of the affected population in the State of Aragua is proving a complex undertaking. Although the state was not directly affected by the floods, it is receiving thousands of families relocated to shelters or staying with relatives or private individuals. This population fluctuates daily as families go back to their place of origin only to return yet again, usually to a different shelter, when it starts raining again and rivers swell.

Relief

- Distributions were carried out in the Federal District between 2 and 5 January (See Annex II).
- Distributions of a total of 28,721 Kg. of food and mixed relief supplies were carried out between 31 December and 9 January in seven parishes in the State of Vargas (See Distribution Table Annex III).
- Between 8 and 17 January field personnel carried out assessments to identify additional target populations in assigned areas, to set up operations centres and hire local personnel to assist with distributions.

The standard Federation relief kits are as follows.

Kitchen kit: pans (3 pieces); frying pan (1 piece), kitchen cutlery (1 set); soup dishes (5 units), dinner dishes (5 units), 3 piece cutlery sets (5 units), plastic glasses (5 units), coffee cups (5 units).

Food Kit: corn flour (12 kg), rice (6 kg), vegetal oil (2 lit.), pasta (6 kg), black beans (6 kg), salt (0,25 kg), sugar (4 kg).

Hygiene kit: toilet-paper (16 rolls), towels (5 units), toothbrush (5 units), toothpaste (2 units), soap (3 units), shampoo (1/2 lit.), deodorant (2 units), women towels (1 packet), shaver (2 units).

Water kit: 20 lit drum (2 units), chlorine (1 lit.), water treatment tablets (0,5 kg).

Sanitary kit: big plastic bags (2 units), small plastic bags (30 units), detergent (2 kg), soap (2 units), broom (3 units), disinfectant (1 kg), floor mop (2 units), water bucket (1 unit).

Logistics

The Federation's warehouse is now fully operational, with standard procedures in place for the reception of bulk relief supplies and a well established pipeline of goods. Local staff have been hired to assume administrative responsibilities and inventories control. Two regional warehouses will be opened shortly. A Daily Warehouse Tracking and Reporting system is now functioning.

In-kind donations that had been detained in customs have been released. Local assistants are being hired to complete the team of logisticians.

Several hundred boxes of unsorted canned goods from private donors will be given to special education schools, orphanages and senior citizen centres. Hygiene kits are being compiled by local paid and volunteer personnel in the central warehouse, utilizing donations from various sources.

One third of the total requirement for hygiene and kitchen kits was ordered from Panama to start the operation. Efforts are underway to purchase the remainder at competitive prices

Logistics (Panama City)

A Federation delegate is coordinating procurement in Panama City. The Panama Red Cross is providing the Federation with strong fully integrated support in the form of office accommodation and equipment, transport, cell phones, staff and volunteers, and liaison

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A Federation delegate is coordinating procurement in Panama City. The Panama Red Cross is providing the Federation with strong fully integrated support in the form of office accommodation and equipment, transport, cell phones, staff and volunteers, and liaison

services with suppliers. The Panama logistics cell is also providing coordination, support and local procurement advice to PNS planning purchases through Panama.

- The first 3 containers of a total purchase of 300,000 Kg of corn flour from the Federation Panama procurement centre has arrived in Venezuela. There are 12 more containers in the pipeline.
- 25,000 food parcels have been ordered. The first consignment is due in Venezuela this week. The first food distributions will start up immediately after its arrival provided the new rainfall and road damage does not compromise initial transport and prevent trucks from reaching the distribution points.
- 2,500 cooking sets are due to arrive in Venezuela on 21 January.

Logistics (Geneva)

Updated reports on the logistics pipeline, relief supplies coverage and tracking of goods in transit are now routinely established by and available from the Logistics Service. (see Annex IV).

Health

- Two Federation health delegates are completing a detailed medium term health Plan of Action, in consultation with the VRC and government authorities, as well as PNS and NGOs. Any recommendations additional to the current Appeal will be announced shortly.
- The first mobile medical brigade for the State of Vargas began work on 15 January. The team consists of a medical doctor, a paramedic, a social worker and a first aid technician, under the guidance of a Federation delegate. A total of 89 medical consultations were given in two remote communities which had not received any medical services since the beginning of the disaster.
- Activities focused on community education in the prevention of cholera, dengue, malaria and leptospirosis. A total of 60 brochures were distributed. Training was given in personal and environmental hygiene. These talks were attended by 25 adults and 17 children.
- Of eight water samples, only 5 were acceptable for human consumption.
- Two WHO kits were sent to the two VRC branches in Valencia and Falcón which will use the kits for their own team.
- Preventive Health Brochures were distributed to the Red Cross branches of Vargas, Miranda, Falcón, Carabobo, Lara, Caracas and Puerto Cabello. The Red Cross branch of Maracay in the State of Aragua has given 14 educational talks in shelters and distributed brochures to an audience of 700. In Valencia (State of Carabobo) there have been 7 educational sessions with an attendance of over 2,000.
- During the VRC branch coordination meeting held 16 January, it was agreed that because of deteriorating weather conditions 2 more mobile medical teams were needed.
- Vaccines against Venezuelan Equine Encephalitis have been delivered. Supplies for the Cleaning Campaign have been purchased and, if it stops raining, this campaign could start early next week.
- VRC volunteers are sorting the large quantities of medicines received by the VRC from local donors into medical kits, with the assistance of the two Federation health delegates. The kits will be forwarded to Valencia, Barquisimeto and Miranda branches. More are being prepared for other branches.

Psychological Support Programme

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Psychological Support Programme

A course for 30 people from 15 branches of the VRC and the Education and Health Ministry, run by an American Red Cross specialist, began 17 January. Federation psychological support delegates from the Mexican Red Cross will help organize and follow up the activities of the trained volunteers. They have also held a motivational meeting for 50 VRC volunteers.

Water-sanitation

A WatSan delegate, shared with the Spanish Red Cross, is coordinating with the French Red Cross on the organisation of the immediate distribution of water in the Valencia and Falcón regions. A local WatSan engineer has been hired and has been attending coordination meetings with PAHO, OXFAM, Ministry of Health and the Water and Sanitation Department of the Venezuelan government.

Tracing Programme

The tracing programme has received a total of 7,500 requests to date. Of these 1,944 had to be eliminated due to incomplete information and a total of 1,394 cases have been satisfactorily resolved.

The tracing delegate will travel around the country to conduct welfare inquiries and will be contacting the local university to recruit more volunteers.

Participating National Societies (PNS)

American Red Cross: The ARC is actively participating with the Federation delegate in the census of IDPs in Valencia (State of Carabobo). It will administer the 8,000 m² warehouse in Valencia. For co-ordination purposes, an ARC planning delegate will review the Federation's reconstruction and rehabilitation plans and those of other PNSs and NGOs working in the region. ARC has offered to supplement the WatSan activities proposed for the region by supplying sodium hypochlorite.

Spanish Red Cross: In the town of Santa Barbara, in the State of Miranda, where the destruction of highways and bridges has left the inhabitants of this area completely isolate,. SRC delegates, VRC volunteers and community volunteers have installed 1,000 lts. and 2,000 lts. fiber glass water tanks, water bladders of 10,000 and 20,000 litres., hired a tanker truck and installed water purification units to distribute drinking water to 80,000 people.

German Red Cross: The GRC continues to supply 10,000 litres of water, about three times a day, to approximately 28,000 people. This project is financed by the German State Department for a period of two months. The GRC has bought kitchen implements and water buckets and is awaiting delivery of three jeeps with mobile tank units to sustain the water system, as well as chemicals to purify water and pipes.

French Red Cross: The FRC delegate has been working in the field this past week.

Italian Red Cross: An IRC Health delegate is expected shortly to work on emergency health response in areas not yet covered, according to recommendations of the Federation team leader and Regional Health Delegate.

Netherlands Red Cross: A NRC delegate arrived last week to coordinate the distribution of relief items donated by the National Society in response to the Appeal in the states of Zulia and Táchira. These items will be delivered overland from Colombia They will be accompanied

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Spanish Red Cross: In the town of Santa Barbara, in the State of Miranda, where the destruction of highways and bridges has left the inhabitants of this area completely isolate,. SRC delegates, VRC volunteers and community volunteers have installed 1,000 lts. and 2,000 lts. fiber glass water tanks, water bladders of 10,000 and 20,000 litres., hired a tanker truck and installed water purification units to distribute drinking water to 80,000 people.

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by Colombian Red Cross volunteers and will be distributed in coordination with the Federation.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The Federation participates in weekly coordination meetings with UN agencies and major NGOs working in Venezuela. The Regional Health Delegate has been participating in coordination meetings with PAHO, OXFAM and Medecins du Monde, France. In Geneva the Federation is represented at OCHA meetings for UN and international agencies.

When the Interamerican Development Bank holds its general assembly in March (at which the Federation will be present) one of the main agenda items will be the natural disasters that have hit Latin America in recent years. The session will analyze preventive and response measure to disasters such as El Niño floods, Hurricane Mitch, the earthquake in Colombia and the floods in Venezuela.

Outstanding needs

Experienced Spanish speaking Finance, Logistics, Health and Telecom Coordination delegates are needed for the Federation team. The VRC health programme needs two more medical brigades, a secretary and a driver, plus local coordinators to work with the Federation's WatSan, Administration and Finance delegates.

Contributions

See Annex 1

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