

PAPUA NEW GUINEA DISPLACED PERSONS

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situation report no. 02

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15 May 1997

The first phase of the relief operation, the distribution of 6,000 family packs, was completed in April, after being held up by the crisis provoked by the government's planned use of mercenaries on Bougainville. Preparations for the second phase, along the west coast, are well advanced and third and fourth phases are scheduled for June and July. Both government security forces and the BRA (Bougainville Revolutionary Army) have lifted travel restrictions for the operation and allowed villagers free access to distribution points.

The context

In the short-term, the operation's priority goal this year is to provide a family kit of basic household items to practically every family on Bougainville, or some 120,000 people who have had to endure eight years of armed conflict and the large-scale population displacement that ensued. The goods are intended to help families who were housed in government resettlement centres or have been living rough, to set up again in their own homes.

The operation will also continue to distribute relief items and medical supplies to health centres and support the Solomon Islands Red Cross efforts to help exiled Bougainvillians.

Latest events

The national crisis caused by revelations that the PNG Government intended to use foreign mercenaries to resolve the Bougainville rebellion has blown over. While a government commission began trying to unravel the tangled story, displays of civil unrest came to an end in early April and the country turned its attention to the upcoming elections.

Meanwhile, the island of Bougainville is enjoying the longest period of tranquillity for years, with almost no serious incidents for over three months. The crisis seems to have created a window of opportunity and initiatives and efforts to forward a strategy for peace and reconciliation are making some headway. Movement, while still restricted, is freer and local markets are thronged with villagers and selling produce not seen for a long time.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

After interrupting distributions in early/mid March due to the political crisis, the Federation /PNGRCS team recommenced distributions from the Arawa warehouse on 21 March and by 18 April almost all 6,000 family packs had been distributed successfully, with no major incidents.

A significant development was the realisation that villagers from far beyond the planned area for the first distribution were walking for up to three days to reach the distribution points. Since the majority were coming from deep within BRA-controlled areas (inaccessible to the Red Cross), this meant that the relief packs were reaching some villages that had not seen new clothing and tools for years.

Discussions and observations indicated that the family packs were well received. The fact that clothing was new and not second-hand was very much appreciated. The overall health and nutritional condition of villagers was better than expected; major health problems were limited to endemic malaria and some diarrhoea. Children seemed quite healthy and vigorous and often accompanied the family to distribution points.

The methodology of placing much of the responsibility for the preparation of beneficiary lists and the organisation of the distribution with the village chiefs and elders has proved to be the right choice, resulting in minimal problems. The role played by the PNGRCS Bougainville staff has also been pivotal in ensuring fairness and transparency of the distributions; their local knowledge of the complex family, culture and structure was indispensable.

Distribution Summary at 18.4.97:

	<u>Families</u>	<u>Persons</u>
February	155	324
March	1,499	6,822
April	<u>4,268</u>	<u>21,904</u>
Total	5,922	29,050

Four Medical Packs, which are adequate for 2,000 people for three months, were distributed during April at Oria and Torokina Health clinic on the west coast. In addition special distributions from existing bulk stocks were made to 16 families that had suffered house fires, illness or came into other special categories.

The team began preparations for the second phase of the operation -- distributions along the west coast from Koreia Mission south to Torokina, then to the inland town of Soevele. This will take place this month when 6,000 family packs will be distributed to 30,000 people. Both Torokina and Soevele have been visited by the delegation and meetings held with the village chiefs, Government Administration and PNGDF. Discussions included village registration lists distributed by a local co-ordinator, plans for ship landing, storage, and transportation inland.

Logistically and security-wise the distributions will be more challenging, but everything indicates that the Red Cross operation is widely accepted. Good contacts are being maintained with the BRA and local government and security forces to minimise risk.

Provided there are no disruptions, the third and fourth distributions will take place in June and July, when again 6,000 family packs will be distributed to 30,000 people each month. The fifth and final distribution will not be planned until it is known how many families still require family packs and where they are located. Stocks will be maintained in the Federation's warehouse in Arawa.

The HoD, who arrived in April, will spend about 75% of his time on Bougainville with the Relief Administrator and will co-ordinate activities on the island. The remainder of his time will be spent in Port Moresby, co-ordinating activities with the PNGRCS.

Outstanding Needs

A Relief Administrator, primarily based on Bougainville, arrived in late April, thus ensuring adequate coverage both on the island and in Port Moresby. A third Delegate, a Programme Co-ordinator to be based in Port Moresby, is being sought and will provide both support to the operation and longer term development and relief support to the PNGRCS. When this happens the operation will be fully staffed, according to the original plan.

One of the two vehicles on Bougainville island was hi-jacked in an ambush in February. Although it was returned, it has suffered substantial damage. If the vehicle cannot be repaired and the interior of the island becomes more accessible, a new pick up truck will be needed.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Good relations have been maintained with the appropriate departments of the PNG Government who are fully supportive of Red Cross activities. The Army commander has facilitated the clearances necessary to allow personnel on to the island and directives have been issued to forces on the island reminding them of the role and Principles of the Movement and particularly of the neutrality and independence of the Red Cross and the need for security forces to allow free access to all villagers and personnel. There have been no breaches of these directives. Equally, assurances of free access where possible have again been given by the BRA commanders, with no incidents this month.

Even greater access inland would make the Red Cross better able to distribute directly to villages and allow closer observation of the beneficiaries' health and living conditions. There are indications that this may eventually happen..

Contributions

Please see Annex 1.

Conclusion

During April, the PNGRCS/Federation Relief Team made good progress on the island. The co-operation of the Security Forces and the BRA has allowed free movement of villagers and there have been virtually no reports of abuse of the process. Minor difficulties have been resolved peacefully by negotiation and common sense.

Red Cross assistance is welcome and viewed as transparent, equitable, appropriate in both content and execution, and a significant contribution towards an environment of hope and stability.

The second phase of the operation, the distribution of family packs along the west coast, will be a more difficult exercise from the point of view of logistics, security, and working and living conditions for the team, but advance information is very positive and it is being approached with cautious optimism.

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