

02 June 1997

PAPUA NEW GUINEA: DISPLACED PERSONS

appeal no. 1.25/97

situation report no. 03

period covered: 1-27 May 1997

Against a heated general election backdrop the second phase of the Federation/PNGRCS relief operation has just begun and plans for the third and fourth phases are being finalised. As a precaution, distributions will be suspended during and immediately after the election. Discussions with both PNG Defence Force officials and BRA representatives have resulted in security assurances for distributions when these move into sensitive areas. To improve and facilitate the complex logistics of the operation, a boat needs to be purchased and an extra delegate should be recruited.

The context

The conflict on Bougainville, a dominating factor in Papua New Guinea (PNG) political life for eight years, takes on even greater prominence as the country prepares for a General Election in mid June. The relative peace on the island that followed the defusing of the mercenary crisis in early April is continuing. The official enquiry is now over, though the final report has not yet been published. The lull in hostilities on Bougainville and freer movement of villagers undoubtedly contributed to the successful completion of the first phase of the Federation / PNGRC relief operation on the island.

Latest events

The run up to the election now dominates daily life in PNG. Campaigning, traditionally "energetic", is in full swing and violence on the mainland has resulted in the deployment of Police and PNGDF units in the Highlands. On Bougainville there have been several violent incidents, attributed to the Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA), which reportedly has stated that it will disrupt the election process. One incident, a road blockade 18-20 May, provoked a mortar bombardment by the Defence Forces (PNGDF) at Kieta, close to the Federation base at Arawa in Central Bougainville. However the last month has remained quite calm and work continued undisturbed.

The Federation in consultation with the PNGRCS will **not carry out operations during the election period.** The decision has been taken to ensure distributions do not become embroiled in

any disruptions and to avoid the possibility of any party involved in the process using the Red Cross operation as a electioneering issue, either by claiming credit or by misrepresenting it.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

After the majority of family packs in the first phase were successfully distributed in April the Federation /PNGRCS team concentrated on preparations for the second phase, covering the Bana Region on the west coast.

Two helicopter visits were made to the selected distribution centres of Torokina and Soevele. The first trip was to collect, review and collate returned lists, and to prepare and brief local village chiefs and co-ordinators, Administration Officials and PNGDF officers on procedures for the distribution. The second visit was an advisory visit to both centres following an unexpected delay in the anticipated arrival date of the ship chartered for the second consignment. Ongoing mechanical problems plus an unplanned hull survey necessitated a new charter. The replacement vessel was to arrive at Torokina on 29 May -- about ten days later than the planned start of phase two -- bringing distributions close to the election period. It is still expected that the distributions will be completed before the election but all parties involved, including the BRA, have been informed of the delay and the decision not to carry out any distribution during the two/three weeks of the election and immediate post election period.

The newly arrived Relief Administrator is currently deployed in the port of Lae to co-ordinate loading and transportation, port clearance and the required security clearances at the military base at Buka in the north of Bougainville.. The delegate will travel with the ship from the loading point to the distribution point at Torokina. The HoD and PNGRCS personnel were scheduled to arrive in Torokina on 28 May.

Additional distributions of remaining family packs were carried out and some additional packs made up from existing stock handed over in response to special requests from remote villages on the periphery of the Kieta area.

Distribution Summary at 27/05/1997

	Families	Persons
February	155	324
March	1,499	6,822
April	4,268	21,904
May	315	1,551
Total	6,237	30,601

Two medical kits were handed over to local health care workers in two village groups. These will cover basic needs for 4,000 people for three months. In addition badly needed replacement crutches for amputees and wheelchairs for war-wounded disabled were distributed from PNGRC stock during the month.

Distribution Plan May/September:

Phase II Bana Region	29 May to 10 June	6,000 families
<i>Election Standby</i>	<i>14 June to 30 June.</i>	

Phase III	Sewai Region	7 August 16 August	6,000 families
Phase IV	Telai (Buin) Region	21 August to 7 September	6,000 families

Medical Kits will be distributed where Health Workers have been identified and can take responsibility for them. In addition Education Friendship Kits from the Rep. Korea National Red Cross will also be handed out where appropriate.

Logistics: Both vehicles have been repaired, giving the team the mobility to undertake some extended travel into the adjacent countryside for the first time in many weeks. While both vehicles are now on the road, the life expectancy of the pick up remains uncertain.

Repairs, improvements and a major outside clean up was carried out on warehouse facilities. The team successfully experimented the use of a boat to bypass sensitive land routes in order to visit outreach villages to survey the effect and acceptance of the distribution of family packs at the village /family level and to deliver crutches. This opens up the possibilities of more extensive use of a boat in the operation. (See outstanding needs)

Security: Various incidents triggered the first field testing of the Satcom phone to contact both the Secretariat and the PNGRCS. The link ups were excellent and reassuring should serious security situations arise requiring fast, secure and confidential communications. However, the sensitivity of deploying the system, its high value and the unwelcome attention this technology attracts means its use must continue to be restricted to essential contacts.

Low profile and patient efforts finally resulted in successful contacts which, combined with subsequent negotiations with the PNGDF, permitted a critical groundbreaking meeting between the Federation/PNGRCS and BRA leaders, officials and the ranking military commander and his senior field officers deep inside the "Uncontrolled Areas" (See External Relations).

National Society (PNGRCS): A much needed International Humanitarian Law (IHL) Workshop was held on 23-25 May. It was jointly sponsored and funded by the Federation PNG Delegation and the ICRC Regional Delegation, Manila. All HQ staff and Council members and representatives of all PNGRCS Branches attended.

Outstanding needs

Transportation: A trial run with a 7m. "Banana Boat" with a 50 H.P Diesel outboard motor proved it to be an effective and cost effective method of covering considerable distances inshore right around the island areas of operation. In addition the freight capacity and utility are evident. (Until now the operation has been relying on expensive helicopter transfers at K1,200/hour or security sensitive overland routes by truck.) Other Red Cross uses are contemplated, such as medivac/ambulance, evacuation, freighting of relief goods and island and outreach visits by the proposed reconstituted Bougainville Branch. The acquisition of a seaworthy second-hand boat with a new motor should be considered (cost about CHF3,000/5,000, not included in the original budget).

Delegates: While the arrival of a long awaited Relief Administrator has been timely, the delays and complications caused by shipping difficulties have further compounded the pressure, and the need for the presence on the island or in transit of both current delegates. The appointment of a Programme Officer/Finance Admin. Delegate,

preferably with some development background, is essential to maintain delegation cohesion.

External Relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media:

ICRC: During the IHL Workshop a detailed, mutual briefing lasting over two days was held between the Federation HoD, PNG and the recently appointed HoD of the ICRC Regional Delegation, Manila. The discussions established a professional, co-operative and transparent relationship for the future which recognises and respects the respective roles and mandates of all three components of the Movement and above all the need to ensure a united and coherent presence of the Movement in PNG and, specifically, on Bougainville.

Government/BRA Positive, cordial meetings were held during the month with the PNGDF Forward and Rear Commanders as well as the local company commanding officer to review and explain operational progress and objectives.

The meeting with the BRA representatives was an opportunity to give clarifications about the current Red Cross operation, and to discuss and gain assurances of security for the ongoing phases of the operation. Existing needs, possible future assistance to health and other services, increased and expanded access into BRA held areas, and assessment and survey opportunities were also discussed. Concerns regarding areas of continuing sensitivity were openly and positively debated. The meeting resulted in the acceptance of the content and execution of the Federation /PNGRCS relief operation from the BRA side, solid positive feed back, and assurances and the promise of letters of "laissez passer" from the BRA in areas that the operation will be moving into in the coming months.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The positive attitude to the programme of all parties gives grounds for hope that a quick and trouble free Phase Two can be completed prior to the elections.

Phase Three and Four preparations are well under way. The supplier is ready to pack and palletise the remaining 12,000 family packs for distribution. Distributions in the Sewai region will commence immediately after the elections in early July. Assurances from the BRA concerning the most sensitive Phase Four area of Buin, where the presence of the PNGDF "POW/Hostages" remains unresolved, may enable this phase to be completed by the end of July or early August.

Clearly the negative consequences on the operation of increasing violence during or after the elections has to be considered as a real possibility and only a careful assessment of the situation on the ground will determine if this timetable can be safely maintained.

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