

PAPUA NEW GUINEA: DISPLACED PERSONS

16 October 1997

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situation report no. 6

period covered: 1 August - 30 September 1997

The six month operation to provide relief kits to practically every family on Bougainville was completed on schedule in mid-September, despite difficult logistics and security conditions. Economies made in the course of the operation have enabled additional assistance to be given, with more aid being planned.

The context

The Papua New Guinea Red Cross Society (PNGRCS)/Federation Bougainville Relief Operation commenced its extended project phase in March 1997. The planned operation was divided into four phases, each targeting 6,000 families in four quadrants of the island. The anticipated duration of the operation, security and weather permitting, was six months. In September, the final phase in the region of Sewei on the south coast was successfully completed, bringing the operation to a close.

Latest events

The situation on Bougainville, while remaining complex and at times insecure, substantially improved as the second round of peace meetings at Burnham, New Zealand got under way. The talks ended on Friday, 10 October, with a truce signed by all parties which outlined immediate measures to stop fighting, pending a formal meeting of leaders, possibly next January.

The Red Cross Bougainville Relief Operation is credited by all parties to the conflict with having contributed to making this agreement possible by demonstrating that co-operation and mutual goodwill can overcome differences and create a more harmonious environment in which peace can be pursued.

The term for the BTG (Bougainville Transitional Government) expires on 31 December and despite opposition objections the PNG government have indicated the mandate will be extended.

On a different front, the drought conditions that have been developing in PNG as a result of the El Nino effect have worsened to the point where the Government, responding to

considerable political pressure, made an ex gratia payment of some PGK 4 million to provincial MPs to assist in their regions. However, reports of deaths, major population movements and up to 700,000 persons seriously affected were questioned and the need for a more detailed and objective assessment and planned, accountable response was clear. Rapid Assessment Teams made available by the Australian government have been travelling throughout the country with NGO observers. Final reports are due in the next three weeks. The Federation and the PNGRCS were represented on these teams. The PNGRCS is launching an internal Appeal, "People Helping People", to raise donations of non-perishable foodstuffs.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

In August, an additional distribution of approximately 900 packs was carried out, remaining from Phase II, deep in the remote BRA-controlled area of the Bana Region. The supplies and medical kits went to remote rebel villages never accessed since the crisis started eight years ago.

Phase IV exceeded expectations. Logistical difficulties, while considerable, were handled more easily than anticipated and the whole operation was completed even faster than the previous distribution.

Despite delays in the arrival of the charter ship, rapid loading and transit plus a welcome improvement in the reception and support by the army on Buka allowed a rapid crossing around the island. The ship arrived on 13 September off Mamagota Beach, where local volunteers and co-ordinators were waiting. Unloading and transport up the trails and to the distribution base was completed in two days. Close co-ordination between the Care Centre and BRA chiefs and leaders, and an adequate supply of trucks allowed an immediate start to distribution on the second day. It was completed two days later.

It became clear that the population of the Sewei areas was lower than anticipated and some 1,800 packs would not be needed. In view of the intention to expand the distributions to include areas in the North not originally included in the Plan of Action a decision was made not to unload the excess but to transfer parcels to the Red Cross Base in Arawa. All the team were back in Arawa by 16 September.

Distribution Summary at 30 September

MONTH	FAMILIES	PERSONS
February	155	324
March	1499	6822
April	4268	21904
May	315	1551
June	4690	20663
July	5729	29673
August	908	4211
September	3815	17,150
TOTAL	21379	102258

The atmosphere on the island improved markedly in September. The arrival of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Pacific Island Regiment, which participated in the ICRC IHL

Workshop, seems to have resulted in better relationships, especially in Buka. It is felt the workshop played an important part in the attitude of these soldiers.

Elsewhere and at the operation site everything was calm and the PNGDF and the BRA contributed to the effective execution of the exercise.

Information & Media:

The Information Delegate (Mobile Electronic Reporting) from Kuala Lumpur spent three weeks in September in PNG, covering a wide range of Red Cross activities as part of his mission to field test the "Direct from the Field" (DFTF) Internet communications technology. In addition he was able to participate in two of the drought assessment teams and report on their findings to the PNGRCS and the Secretariat in Geneva.

Outstanding needs

At present, there are no outstanding material needs for the Bougainville Relief Operation .

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The Secretary General of the PNGRCS and the HoD visited a number of Ministers and senior government officials in Port Moresby in August to brief them on the operation and the planning for 1998 and to monitor progress on the ICRC MoU. They included the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bougainville Affairs, Attorney General's Office and the Prime Minister's Office. Three days were also spent visiting the premier of the BTG and his senior officials in Buka for the same exercise.

The HoD ICRC , Manila visited PNG twice in August to work with the PNGRCS and the government ministries involved in processing the ICRC MoU. In addition the HoD Federation and ICRC discussed their respective planning objectives for PNG for 1998 with a view to ensuring future co-ordination.

The PNGRCS and the delegation have been working closely with AusAID on planning for next year's appeal as well as the additional distributions this year.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The final planned distribution has brought the operation to a successful conclusion. Adjustments and economies have allowed the Red Cross to offer additional assistance to the north of the island and a resettlement package of construction tools for returning villagers is under consideration. Ample buffer stocks are in place in strategically located stores around the island. Increased access by road will allow more detailed follow up and surveys for the future. An additional two distributions will be carried out in October and reported on later.

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