

COLOMBIA: FLOODS

17 February 2000

Information Bulletin N° 1

The Disaster

Half of Colombia, or 22 of its 31 departments, has been seriously affected by floods, landslides, avalanches and sea swells due to heavy rains during the last three months of 1999 and January 2000. The continuous rains have been caused by the Pacific Cold Phenomenon, known as *La Niña*. Additionally, Hurricane Lenny hit the Atlantic coast and caused damage due to heavy seas in three departments: Atlántico, Magdalena and Guajira. According to the Civil Defence this is the worst flooding in Colombia the last 25 years.

An emergency was declared in five provinces: Cauca, Nariño, Huila, Putumayo and Valle, in the south west, in the Andean region and in the Atlantic area. The Government declared a Red Alert in the regions near the Cauca, Magdalena, Atrato, Patía and Sinú riverbanks.

Altogether, some 524 floods, 139 landslides, 28 avalanches and 6 heavy seas events have affected 769 municipalities in 22 Departments. The departments of Caquetá, Chocó, Atlántico, Magdalena and La Guajira are the worst hit: 59.830 families or 500.000 individuals, are affected. Of these, 70.000 have been evacuated and are now in temporary shelters. The socio-economic impact of the rains in the agricultural sector alone represents a loss of \$ 85 million. Among buildings damaged are those of four Red Cross branches.

According to the International Research Institute for Climate Prediction (IRI), heavy rains will continue in February, March and April in the Andean, Pacific and Caribbean regions of Colombia, with strong hurricane winds on the Atlantic coast.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

As an initial response to the emergency the Colombian Red Cross (CRC) mobilised over 5,000 volunteers from 22 Red Cross Department Branches and 60 Municipal Operative Units. Damages were assessed and the victims' needs were analysed.

During the Red Alert in the regions near Magdalena, Atrato, Patía and Sinú riverbanks the National Society carried out an assessment in co-operation with local and regional Emergency Committees co-ordinated by the National Disaster System (*Sistema Nacional para la Prevención y Atención de Desastres*; SNPAD). The local committees participated in evacuating and temporarily relocating the people affected or at risk, and distributed relief items from the National Calamity Fund (*Fondo Nacional de Calamidades*; FNC). The Colombian Red Cross worked together with the Health Ministry in the areas affected by the rains, conducting Health Field Days and equipping health care centres.

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During the emergency in the Caquetá, Chocó, Atlántico, Magdalena and La Guajira departments during the last three months of 1999, the Colombian Red Cross distributed food and non food relief items to 29,477 families or 170,164 persons in 18 municipalities.

In addition to the Colombian Red Cross's own funds, the ICRC donated CHF 21,500 in kind. The following National Societies contributed to the operation with cash: German Red Cross, American Red Cross, Spanish Red Cross/ECHO and Canadian Red Cross. The Colombian National Disaster System contributed CHF 35,200.

Needs

Based on the assessment carried out the Colombian Red Cross will assist in the delivery of supplies to 19,000 beneficiaries or 3,932 families during a three month period, in the following departments: Antioquia (667 families), Cauca (640 families), Cecar (255 families), Huila (417 families), Nariño (740 families), Norte de Santander (204 families), Tolima (371 families), Valle de Cauca (638 families).

The total cost of the operation is approximately CHF 500,000. The Federation has released CHF 100,000 from its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF). The Colombian Red Cross hopes to receive additional support from sister societies as its warehouses are now empty.

Plan of action

The Colombian RC will assist the 19,000 affected families as follows:

- food assistance: two food packages for each family;
- non food assistance: kitchen, clothing and cleaning products kits, mattresses, sheets and blankets for each family;
- health and basic sanitation: health field days, safe drinking water, and medications.

In addition the Colombian Red Cross will assist in:

- giving first aid to the affected families;
- rehabilitation: assistance in reconstruction of partially or totally damaged homes;
- the repair of the four branches affected by the flooding.

The operation will be monitored and, when finished, evaluated by the Colombian Red Cross. A Final Report will be submitted to donors.

The Colombian Red Cross has 54,000 active volunteers and 2,450 employees in 31 Red Cross Branches, with 232 Municipal Operative Units and Support Groups. Its operations, although decentralised, are controlled and co-ordinated by its National Operations and Relief Office.

Peter Rees-Gildea Director
Operations Funding and
Reporting Department

Santiago Gil
Director Americas Department

This and other reports on Federation operations are available on the Federation's website: <http://www.ifrc.org>

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