

THE PHILIPPINES: VOLCANIC ERUPTION

25 February 2000

Information Bulletin N° 1

The Disaster

Mount Mayon in Albay, Legazpi province, erupted yesterday, 24 February, throwing out huge lumps of fiery debris and red hot ash, and forcing the evacuation of about 30,000 people. Ash blanketed the immediate vicinity, where temperatures reached up to 1,000 degrees Celsius.

The authorities, who expect a major eruption, are evacuating over 50,000 people living within a radius of eight kilometres around the volcano. Alert Level V, the highest, indicating a hazardous eruption in progress, has been announced. A "state of calamity" has been declared for the entire province of Albay. Thousands of villagers are sheltering in schools and government buildings outside the danger area. All commercial flights in the area have been cancelled.

Experts fear that the continuing flow of magma to the dome herald an explosive eruption. The volcano has been restive since June last year. An explosion in September forced more than 5,700 people to flee their homes. Mayon's most violent eruption in 1814 killed about 1,200 people. Its last eruption in February 1993 killed about 70 people. Since 24 February, 14 explosions had been recorded.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Philippines National Red Cross (PNRC), through its Albay-Legaspi chapter, is helping in the evacuation of people from within the 8km danger zone and, in co-ordination with the Local Government Units (LGU), is providing emergency assistance to the evacuees.

Besides working with the authorities to continuously monitor the situation, the PNRC head office has deployed an assessment team in the area, placed the Disaster Response Team on standby and moved other support staff and volunteers to Albay province. The National Food Authority has 1,200 sacks of rice at the disposal of the PNRC for the first three days of the relief operation for those evacuated. Additionally, the headquarters is delivering canned food, bottled water, dust masks and other supplies, including communication facilities, to Albay in readiness for a major eruption. An initial working advance of Peso 100,000 (approx CHF 3,900) has also been released.

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Needs

With its extensive experience in disaster response and management and its close co-operation with the authorities, the Philippines National Red Cross is able to cope with the current level of the disaster. National Societies will be kept informed of developments.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
Operations Funding and Reporting Department

Hiroshi Higashiura
Director
Asia and Pacific Department

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