

# INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies  
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge  
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja  
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

## ***CENTRAL AMERICA: DROUGHT***

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*This Information Bulletin is being issued based on the current situation and the information available at this time. Depending on the evolving nature of the drought, the Federation may consider the need for further support through an international appeal.*

### ***The Situation***

Initial estimates indicate that some 1.5 million subsistence farmers in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua have lost thousands of hectares of crops as a result of drought, compounded by additional aggravating factors. The situation is considered particularly serious in Honduras where the government declared a state of emergency in the south, centre and west on 23 July, and in Nicaragua where lack of rain has coincided with a dramatic fall in coffee prices, forcing thousands out of work. The World Food Programme states that around 695,000 people are in need of urgent food aid in the region and it is feared that farmers may leave the land and head for already overcrowded cities.

In Honduras, the WFP estimates that in 13 worst affected provinces, an average of 78.7 per cent of crops have been lost. Nicaragua has been hit by the worst drought for years and the plunge in the value of coffee has resulted in the closure of coffee plantations and large-scale loss of employment for day labourers. In El Salvador, four departments in the east are worst affected by the drought with crop losses of up to 90 per cent. In Guatemala, the north east and central parts of the country have been badly affected.



In recent days, 41 people died of hunger in the municipalities of Jocotán and Comatán within the department of Chiquimula in the north east of Guatemala on the border with Honduras. This situation has been brought about

through a series of inter-related factors such as prolonged lack of rain to sustain crops, essentially maize and beans, extreme poverty in the region compounded by the dramatic fall in the price of coffee and a lack of income to purchase food as a result of a significant drop in the sale of produce.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent Action***

The National Societies in the region have continued to monitor the drought situation through assessments, liaison with the government, the WFP and NGOs.

Between 2 and 5 August 2001, the Honduran Red Cross undertook distributions in the departments of Valle and Choluteca in the south of the country. The municipality of Moropocay in Valle was targeted since 93 per cent of its population are subsistence farmers who had lost their entire crop. 10 communities in Choluteca and 13 communities in Valle were selected. Difficulty of access resulted in some beneficiaries walking for some 9 hours in order to receive their ration. A total of 1,000 beneficiary families received one quintal\* of maize.

On 1 September, the Guatemalan Red Cross (GRC) undertook an evaluation of the situation in six villages in the department of Chiquimula in which the National Society and the American Red Cross have been working for some two years in water and sanitation projects. There were alarming signs of severe malnutrition. The GRC, with the support of the American Red Cross, distributed 70 quintals of maize, 24 quintals of beans and 24 quintals of rice to villages in Camotán. Between 8 and 9 September, the distribution of 20 quintals of maize, 9 quintals of rice and 9 quintals of beans is envisaged in the municipality of Jocatán. In addition, the National Society has set up two centres in Guatemala city and in the Chiquimula branch office in order to receive donations for vulnerable communities; this initiative is proving most successful.

It is expected that severe food shortages will continue beyond the next harvest since it has not been possible to sow the next crop either because of continued dry conditions or because seed meant for sowing has been consumed. The regional delegation for Central America is therefore liaising with the Federation delegations and National Societies in the region with a view to issuing a regional appeal. While one component of the appeal would be provision of food for the short term, other components under consideration are supplies of seeds and fertilisers together with training in their use and community education on such topics as water conservation.

*\* one quintal is the equivalent of approximately 50 kg.*

For a full description National Society profiles in the region, see [www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)

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*All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.*

*For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>*

*For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.*

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