



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

INDIA: COMMUNAL UNREST IN GUJARAT

8 March 2002

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Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) Allocated: CHF 50,000

This Bulletin is being issued based on the needs described below reflecting the information available at this time. Based on further updates and details from assessment reports, or should the situation deteriorate, the Federation will consider international support through an Appeal.

The Situation

For the past ten days, India's western state of Gujarat has been in the grip of serious communal unrest and violence following the attack on an Ahmedabad bound passenger train at Godhra railway station on 27 February, resulting in significant death and injury. Subsequent rioting in Ahmedabad, the state's commercial capital and outlying villages in the eastern part of Gujarat has left over 600 people dead. Torching of homes and businesses, attacks on individuals and rioting brought the city and the entire state to a halt affecting some tens of thousands as homes were destroyed, businesses shut down and food supplies cut off.

According to reports in the local press over 30,000 people in Ahmedabad are currently housed in 24 relief centres throughout the city. Overcrowding in unclean buildings poses a serious health threat. Buildings such as schools which are being used as temporary shelters are currently housing up to ten times their capacity. Consequently hygiene and sanitation is a serious concern increasing the risk of the spread of disease. In addition, many of those who have sought shelter sustained serious burns which could become easily infected under such conditions.

The unrest is a setback to the already weakened state's efforts to recover from the massive earthquake in January 2001. In response to the rioting the government immediately deployed military and police forces to protect residents and, curfews were imposed in Ahmedabad and selected villages throughout affected area. Although the situation remains tense, particularly in Ahmedabad's 'old city', with many inhabitants still afraid to leave their homes, businesses have begun to operate again and many of the curfews have been lifted.

The Indian Red Cross Society (IRCS) was the first humanitarian organisation to provide medical and food assistance to victims of the trouble.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Action

Responding to a request for assistance from the IRCS, the Federation has released CHF 50,000 from the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF). Volunteers from the IRCS Gujarat State and district branches moved rapidly to provide food and medical assistance to the victims of the violence. The IRCS branch in Godhra rapidly mobilized

supplies of blood and emergency items while volunteers from the Gujarat State Branch quickly established a community kitchen in Ahmedabad which has provided meals to over 3,000 people.

On 5 March volunteers from the IRCS Ahmedabad branch commenced the distribution of relief goods in temporary shelters which have been set up in the old city. As of last night (7 March), the branch which has been distributing relief items to two or three shelters per day had provided some 3,412 families (6-8 members to each family) in nine shelters with necessary items such as food, medical supplies, clothing and blankets. Food packages comprise rice, dal, oil, sugar and tea while medical supplies have included, antibiotics, analgesics, oral rehydration salts, skin ointments, cotton, chlorine tablets, bandages and cough syrups. Distributions of food medicine and tents are scheduled for two more shelters on today (8 March). The branch has also deployed two doctors, two nurses and an ambulance. The IRCS has distributed some 1,600 units of blood to hospitals in Ahmedabad (the four municipal facilities), Himmatnagar, Anand and Bhavnagar.

Overall, the IRCS is respected as an organisation which can work in areas where tensions are highest and to date has received close to INR 200,000 from private donations. The Society's national headquarters has released emergency funds to provide for the immediate needs of the affected population and is dispatching cooking utensils and medicine from the warehouse in Delhi. The Chairman and the Secretary General of the IRCS are scheduled to visit Ahmedabad on Monday (11 March).

Already present in Ahmedabad because of the ongoing recovery and rehabilitation operation, a Federation delegate has been working closely with the Honorary Secretary of the IRCS Gujarat State Branch since 27 February providing technical support and advice concerning the management of emergencies. The volatile situation has attracted considerable attention from the media. Coverage of IRCS activities has been featured by the BBC, the Times of India and on the Federation's web site.

The Federation is also providing technical assistance to the state branch by deploying the Gujarat health coordinator to assist the branch with health interventions and assessments and, the reporting delegate to assist with the branch's current reporting needs. PNS working in Gujarat are also receiving support from the Federation on security matters.

The IRCS and the Federation are working in close coordination with local authorities, the Ahmedabad Disaster Management Institute and aid agencies in Ahmedabad.

Needs

Over-crowded temporary shelters lacking adequate facilities for sanitation and plumbing has created urgent health related and water and sanitation needs. In addition people who have lost or been driven out of their homes require clothing and food.

The Federation is seeking reimbursement of the CHF 50,000 released from the DREF through this information bulletin. Currently the IRCS is planning to provide 10,000 beneficiaries with food, clothing and cooking utensils over the next two weeks as well as offering basic medical care in four temporary shelters. Over the coming week, more detailed assessments of the situation will be complete and a further request for funds to cover IRCS work in support of the victims may come forward.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see 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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