

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

PAPUA NEW GUINEA: VOLCANO

8 December 2004

The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilising the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organisation and its millions of volunteers are active in over 181 countries.

In Brief

This Information Bulletin (no. 02/2004) is being issued based on the needs described below reflecting the information available at this time. DREF funds up to CHF 50,000 have been allocated. Further updates will be issued as required.

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The situation

Volcanic eruptions on Manam Island, continue daily and large-scale eruption continues to be a risk. Critical shortages of food and water for between 3,500 and 4,500 people remaining on the island, continues to pose a significant threat. The alert level – three – allows for voluntary evacuation of the island. This began on November 27 and is anticipated to take two weeks to complete. It is expected some 1200 more people will arrive on the mainland within a day or so of the writing of this report.

Manam Island, with an area of 83 square kilometres, lies 15 kilometres off the PNG coast near the town of Bogia, in Madang Province. It comprises 16 villages and some 9,600 inhabitants. The government has been actively promoting the evacuation of all the island's inhabitants since volcanic activity that began with an eruption in October increased in intensity late in November. The focus of activity in response to the emergency has shifted considerably to the mainland, where evacuees continue to face extremely serious challenges.

The Madang Provincial Administration, which is coordinating the evacuation estimates that some 5,500 people have so far been relocated to the mainland. There, they are initially housed in a transitional camp at Bogia Station before moving to one of three longer-term camps that have been established at Mangem, Asuramba and Potsdam. Tensions between authorities and local landowners, who have allegedly demanded that evacuees' stay be limited to six months, have been reported in local newspapers.

Red Cross personnel in each camp location have reported an estimated total of 3525 people, of which some 600 have just arrived at the transitional camp in Bogia.

| Camp Location | Estimated number of people (as of 8 Dec 04) |
|-------------------------|--|
| Mangem | 785 |
| Asuramba | 1340 |
| Potsdam | 800 |
| Bogia transitional camp | 600 |
| Total | 3525 |

The number of people needing to be relocated to the mainland is presenting particular challenges to local authorities, which have not previously faced an emergency operation of this type or magnitude.

The PNG Health Department has recently stationed a health team in each camp, comprising a nurse, a health extension officer and three community health workers. A lack of latrines has been identified as a significant health threat during the recent Red Cross field visit and has since been

confirmed by an Australian Red Cross water and sanitation delegate who began an assessment of water and sanitation needs in the camps on 4 December.

A particularly disturbing development has been two incidents of rape committed against women in the process of evacuating from Manam Island. A planned police presence, including female officers, had not yet been fully deployed in the camps at the time of writing, but in any case, at least one of these incidents reportedly took place before the victim reached the camps.¹ The issue of gender-based violence against women and children – including sexual assault and domestic violence – is clearly an issue that continues to require attention.

Red Cross Red Crescent Action

The PNG Red Cross, with the assistance of the Federation's PNG delegation, devised a two-phase response plan, in coordination with PNG authorities. Phase one involved the distribution of 400 water containers and 1,000 tarpaulins to people affected by the volcano. While these activities are continuing, phase two has commenced with the deployment of experienced Red Cross staff to conduct a second assessment, focusing particularly on the water and sanitation needs of evacuees.

An interim report on the water and sanitation situation of camps suggests water availability at the camps could be ensured with a relatively small-scale intervention, primarily carried out by camp residents themselves. Water at the sites can be accessed via relatively shallow wells (depths of roughly three metres), a number of which exist in each camp. These wells have generally been dug within 100m of the shore and the delegate was advised that the wells had never run dry.

The report further states existing water sources need to be protected and improved and the number of wells increased to cater for expanding camp populations. Placement of tanks for spring and rainwater storage in two camps has also been recommended. The need for jerrycans for safe storage of collected water remains, as does the need for water purification tablets to ensure the safety of water.

The lack of sanitation – particularly latrines – poses a more serious problem as residents of all three camps have no choice but to defecate in bushland or on the beach. As shorelines are also sometimes sites for water collection, the risk for spread of disease is high.

Office and storage facilities provided by the Asuramba Plantation Authority have been used to create a central point of contact for Red Cross activities in the camps, transmitting information by satellite phone between the field, the Madang branch of the PNG Red Cross and PNG Red Cross headquarters.

The PNG Red Cross has also identified, among the population of displaced persons, Red Cross volunteers trained in basic first aid and disaster vulnerability and capacity awareness (as part of the PNG Red Cross's community-based self-reliance programme). From those volunteers, three teams comprising two men and one woman each have been created providing a permanent Red Cross presence in each camp to assist the displaced people.

¹ "Evacuees raped," *Post-Courier*, Monday, December 6, 2004, p. 4

These volunteers are focusing their efforts on the distribution of relief items to new arrivals at the camps and providing situation reports. As a result of this structure, Red Cross is extremely well positioned to monitor and communicate the evolving needs of the camp populations and to ensure an appropriate and timely response.

A joint visit to the camps by the PNG Red Cross and the Federation earlier this week observed that children appeared to be facing the greatest immediate need. Diarrhoea does not appear to be a serious problem at this stage. Malaria, however, has been indicated by a number of sources including the Red Cross field visit team and government authorities as a growing problem. There has also been a reported case of measles in one of the camps, with the child in question being placed in isolation.

Constructive consultation and coordination has continued with all stakeholders, from international donors to national and provincial authorities through to camp volunteers and beneficiaries. PNG Red Cross and the Federation have established a productive working relationship with authorities at provincial and national levels thus improving communication between provincial authorities and ultimately between the authorities and outside agencies. The relationship with the government also promotes effective coordination of response and has secured important support for the Red Cross effort such as the provision of a vehicle specifically for PNG Red Cross use.

Negotiations on responding to the need for health education and sanitation in camps have begun between Red Cross, local and national authorities and other agencies.

In addition to a DREF allocation of CHF 50,000, support to the value of approximately AUD70,000 has been pledged by the Australian aid agency, AusAID, through Australian Red Cross. New Zealand Red Cross has committed NZD10,000 in support for the replenishment of stocks of relief items.

The United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, has agreed to supply water purification tablets and mosquito nets, both of which will be distributed by the PNG Red Cross. A memorandum of understanding was being prepared at the time of this report. Discussions have also commenced between PNG Red Cross and UNICEF on a proposal for UNICEF to provide training for Red Cross volunteers in the delivery of community health education. Meanwhile, material support for the PNG authorities' emergency response has also been forthcoming from the government of Japan.

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.

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