

# 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

## MADAGASCAR: CYCLONE ELITA

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### In Brief

**This Information Bulletin no. 01/2004 is being issued for information only. The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.**

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### The Situation

Tropical Cyclone Elita hit the Indian Ocean island of Madagascar three times between 26 January and 4 February 2004, causing loss of life and extensive damage. Local authorities in Madagascar later reported on 13 February 29 dead, 100 wounded, and 44,190 homeless. In addition 12,408 houses were partially or totally destroyed while 510 schools and hospitals suffered major damages. Roads, electricity and communications infrastructures were equally affected. Heavy rains and floods marooned sizeable agricultural areas and destroyed a large percentage of the corn, rice and manioc crops that constitute the food base of the population. The cyclone struck a 600km swathe touching five out of the six provinces of the island, namely Majunga, Antananarivo, Fianarantsoa, Tamatave and Tuléar.

Assessment missions by government authorities were conducted in extremely difficult circumstances with reconnaissance planes and helicopters being frequently grounded due to unfavourable weather conditions. A report of the situation is still expected from the government.

In some areas such as Mainairano District, north-western Mahajanga Province, estimates indicate 90 per cent of the buildings have been seriously damaged by the rains. Some 7,000 people were forced to find shelter in stadiums and the few public buildings left standing. Concerns were raised over the potential threat of waterborne diseases outbreaks and authorities planned to provide communities with water purification tablets.

National authorities have recently launched an international appeal for USD 80,000 to assist the affected population for an initial three months period. According to UNOCHA, some emergency relief items such as rice, sugar, soap,

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candles, matches and purification tablets have reached the affected areas and a mobile medical team dispatched. Two government helicopters and one French Government fixed wing aircraft have been made available for transport of relief supplies. The Malagasy Government conveyed 4 tons of rice seeds to Morondava, 10 tons of rice and the bottled water to Ambatolampy. UNICEF has financed the purchased rehabilitation materials, temporary shelters and several thousands of bottles drinking water. WFP provided 80 tons of flour, MSF set up a one month mission to clean wells in Marovoay. USAID is leading an agricultural rehabilitation mission to Marovoay and Maintirano. The UNDP is funding transportation of this assistance and the Embassy of Germany has provided 50 000 USD for the purchase of rehabilitation materials.

The UN and the humanitarian community in Madagascar are at work to rehabilitate the schools as well as to provide food aid to the affected families. Aid distribution and relief efforts are co-ordinated by the government's National Relief Council in close liaison with their provincial and local representatives.

**Red Cross and Red Crescent action**

There were significant difficulties in ascertaining the impact of the cyclone due to the length of time the weather system remained over Madagascar prohibiting air survey and due to the fact that telephone lines and roads were. Once access was possible the Madagascar Red Cross (CRM) deployed an assessment and response team to the affected areas. This team made an immediate distribution of relief items (mosquito nets, soaps, candles) in Marovoay. A team consisting of a coordinator and four volunteers from Majunga and eight from Marovoay set up a system of water treatment and distribution of providing 45 000 litres potable water per day using equipment pre-positioned through the PIROI. This assisted 3,000 people with clean water while the water distribution system was being repaired.

In the mean time, the Indian Ocean Regional Intervention Platform (PIROI), a sub-regional disaster preparedness and response structure, based in La Réunion supported by the French Red Cross, were on alert ready to deploy relief items or qualified staff if required. The PIROI was in constant communication with the Disaster Management Department of the Regional Delegation in Nairobi. The CRM did not request the activation of the PIROI. CRM intervened with forty first-aid workers and mobilized its emergency stock, principally water storage and treatment material, mosquito nets and soap, positioned by the PIROI in Madagascar. The CRM plans to distribute stocks to meet the immediate needs of 22,860 disaster victims. Disaster preparedness stocks have been recently replenished with support from the PIROI and the PIROI will reinforce the emergency stock of the CRM with the water treatment equipment, plastic sheeting and tents in the next months.

After the good response to cyclone Manou by CRM last year, the French government contacted the CRM and offered financial assistance. On 20 February the CRM learned that the French Embassy in Madagascar had agreed to a donation of 6,000 Euros (7,615 USD) for food distribution. As such 1,400 families in Maintirano, Vohipeno and Morondava will receive rice, beans, cooking oil and soap. The relief distribution will take place shortly and the CRM will also review the humanitarian needs in these areas in line with their emergency relief mandate and report accordingly. The CRM also plans the distribution of non-food items in two areas of the Province of Antananarivo: Akazobe and Soavinandriana.

The Federation's Regional Disaster Management Co-ordinator and Organizational Development Delegate met with representatives of the Disaster Co-ordination Department of the CRM and PIROI during a planning meeting in Reunion on 20 February to discuss the cyclone and response. The national society requested a stronger involvement and long-term support from the regional delegation in the disaster preparedness and contributed to the planning of the new Federation Sub-Office for the Indian Ocean. A PIROI representative was also present and welcomed the initiatives discussed. The most urgent outstanding needs remain provision of food to cyclone victims, rehabilitation of school, medical and road infrastructures, distribution of basic medical supplies, mosquito nets and water purification tablets as well as distribution of seeds and fertilizers to replace the lost crops. Although an appeal will not be launched for the present situation, the Federation would like to remind its partners that Madagascar, as well as other Indian Ocean islands, are prone to destructive cyclones. The official cyclone season is from mid November to mid April. It is worth noting that in May 2003, tropical cyclone Manou pounded Madagascar's east coast leaving 70 people dead and some 115,000 in need of aid. The tropical storm season in the Indian Ocean islands sub-region is far from over.

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