

# 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 15 March 2004

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

### In Brief

This Information Bulletin (no. 03/2004) is being issued based on the needs described below reflecting the information available at this time. While the Federation initially indicated that an appeal would not be launched, information recently received from the affected areas show significant needs, and an Emergency Appeal is therefore under preparation, to be issued this week. Support in the form of non-food items will be needed for distribution to those affected in the southwest of the island.

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

### The Situation

Tropical cyclone Gafilo made landfall in the northeastern part of Madagascar on 7 March 2004 (north of the city of Antalaha), crossed the northern part of the island, and departed from the country on 8 March 2004. A day later, Gafilo returned as a tropical storm and hit the southwest where it diminished in strength, turned north over land, and finally left Madagascar heading east on 12 March, where it decreased in strength over the Indian Ocean. Madagascar is still recovering from tropical cyclone Elita which hit the island three times between 26 January and 4 February 2004, and left 44,190 homeless.

As a result of tropical cyclone Gafilo, as of 13 March 2004 the Conseil National de Sécurité (CNS) reports that 59 people have been confirmed dead, 43 are unaccounted for, and 21 are injured. It is estimated that the lives or livelihoods of approximately 171,000 people have been directly or indirectly affected by the cyclone. A ferry carrying 113 people went missing on Sunday 7 March 2004. Two passengers were rescued, but the others are feared dead. A fishing boat with 9 people on board has also been lost since that time.

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With a speed of up to 300 km/h, cyclone Gafilo is the most intense cyclone to have hit Madagascar in ten years. Despite this, the damage caused by the winds was less than first expected. Overall, the damage caused by Galifo has resulted more from flooding than from wind. Extensive wind damage is limited to the eastern coast around Antalaha where the cyclone first hit land. In Antalaha, medical doctors sent out for the first phase of the disaster response by the CRM and French Red Cross estimate that 80% of the houses are damaged or destroyed. A camp for displaced people has been set up in town where 419 people are currently residing. The town's harbour has been badly damaged and is not operational. Food prices have shot up by 35%. Roads and bridges connecting the town to the outlying villages are inaccessible. Electricity, water and telephone lines were cut. The hospital is largely intact except for the paediatric department that was left without a roof. Medical supplies were not affected. Houses built with solid materials remain relatively undamaged, while those constructed with local materials sustained heavy damage.

The main concern is the damage caused by the subsequent extensive floods affecting the northeast, northwest, west and part of the east. Some of these areas coincide with those previously affected by cyclone Elita, where stocks and resources have already been depleted. Extensive areas are currently flooded causing displacement of an unknown number of people. Western areas surveyed by plane indicate that many villages are totally under water, with only those located on hilltops visible. It is, however, estimated that the rains will soon stop and waters recede. A related concern is the potential for an increase in water borne diseases such as malaria, cholera, and diarrhoea. Another longer-term impact of the cyclone and subsequent floods is the destruction of crops. The vanilla crops around Antalaha have suffered up to an 80% loss (the projections were that this was to be the first year in some time for a full vanilla harvest; vanilla has a cycle of four years to reach maximum yield). Rice fields have also suffered substantial damage, and will in many areas be 100% lost. This gives rise to concern for the food security situation as of May, when the next harvest was expected.

The Conseil National de Sécurité (CNS) has been reinforced with support from the Regional UN OCHA office in Johannesburg in order to strengthen coordination on the ground. OCHA is helping the CNS in setting up a database on "Who-does-what-where". As information is scarce and quite incomplete, the UN agencies have set up a working group to help the Government provide rapid assessments of the needs within 5 key sectors: food and nutrition, water and sanitation, education, agriculture, and health.

International NGOs such as Care-International, Médecins du Monde, and MSF are supporting needs assessments; the Care response is focused on the rural areas with distribution of emergency supplies such as plastic sheeting and rice seeds, medium-term rehabilitation of agricultural infrastructure, and the rudimentary rehabilitation of schools. MSF and Médecins du Monde have sent medical team to assess the health situation and to provide medical assistance.

**Red Cross and Red Crescent action**

The Madagascar Red Cross (CRM) immediately teamed up with the French Red Cross at La Réunion who activated its Platform of Regional Intervention for the Indian Ocean (PIROI). PIROI, and deployed a logistician and a coordinator to support the CRM in the initial assessment in Antalaha. Furthermore, PIROI sent a water treatment unit and a water engineer with the capacity to provide clean drinking water to 10,000 people, together with 200 jerry cans and chlorination tablets, tents, and 968 plastic sheets for temporary shelter. The supplies arrived by boat on 11 March and the water treatment unit is up and running. In addition to the water treatment unit, PIROI has provided two water tanks to be used to truck and distribute water in areas without access to clean drinking water. The CRM has mobilized 40 volunteers, and the provincial president has provided a personal truck for the water distribution operation. The PIROI team is to be replaced over the weekend. The CRM, together with the local civil authorities, has helped the French Government's Action Humanitaire France with erecting tents to provide shelter for the homeless.

The Malagasy Red Cross has requested Federation support in providing assistance to the 5,000 families in the southwest (around Morombé). Toliara is the nearest airport to Morombé and the Malagasy Red Cross coordinator is mobilizing volunteers and assessing warehouse capacity in readiness to receive supplies for those affected.

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