

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

VANUATU: MT. AMBAE VOLCANO

6 December 2005

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 Bulletin (no. 01/2005) is being issued for information only, and reflects the status of the situation and information available at this time. The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

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All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organisations \(NGO's\) in Disaster Relief](#) and is committed to the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For longer-term programmes in this or other countries or regions, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal. For support to or for further information concerning Federation programmes or operations in this or other countries, or for national society profiles, please also access the Federation's website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

The Situation

On 27 November, a volcano erupted on Ambae island, situated north of a central chain of islands in the Vanuatu archipelago known for their active volcanoes. There have been no casualties so far, but ash spewed forth by the volcano has blanketed houses and food crops. The provincial centre reports that a total of 8,163 villagers live in high-risk areas near the volcano – classified as the red zone (see [annex](#) for a map of the various zones) – with 3,607 of them living west of Ambae island, 1,390 in the south and 3,166 in the north. There are concerns that the ash may affect the respiratory systems of local residents and contaminate water sources, as fears of further possible eruptions mount.

The government of Vanuatu has declared the island a disaster zone, and communities in high-risk areas have started to relocate to safe areas. Two ships are on standby near the coast in case a rapid evacuation would be required. The on-the-ground relocation is being coordinated by the local provincial disaster committee, while some communities have also begun evacuating southwards or to nearby villages on their own. To accommodate a potential need for increased health care, health workers from two nearby islands have relocated to Ambae, while local health centres have increased their capacity.

Vanuatu's national disaster management office (NDMO) has activated its emergency operations centre, and has been providing regular updates on the situation. Two UN experts have been despatched to assist the NDMO. A

team of scientists is conducting surveys of the site, and a volcanologist has travelled to the area with additional equipment to step up monitoring activities on Ambae island.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The Vanuatu Red Cross Society (VRCS) has been actively involved since Mt. Ambae erupted last week. Two VRCS staff has been deployed to Ambae to support the authorities and local volunteers with evacuation efforts and the distribution of relief supplies to safe areas. The VRCS has been coordinating closely with the NDMO and the provincial disaster committee, as well as the Federation regional delegation in Suva and other Red Cross partners. A liaison volunteer has been attached to the NDMO to obtain updated reports on the evolving situation. Staff and volunteers have recently undergone emergency response team training, and can now put their newly acquired skills to use as several have been despatched to the disaster area to help coordinate and distribute relief items.

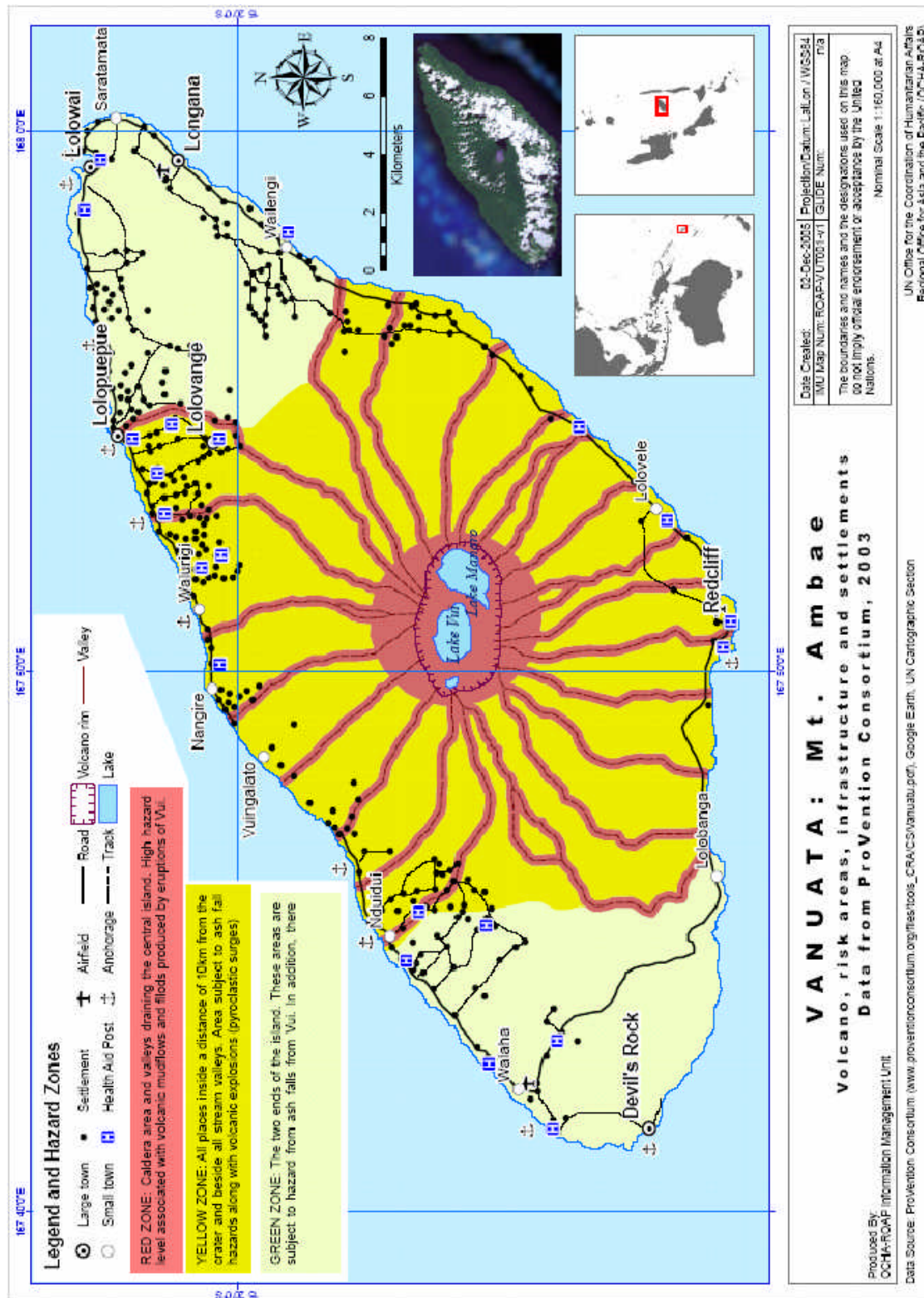
So far, VRCS has distributed 66 family kits comprising blankets, tarpaulins, water containers, candles and kitchen sets in safe areas on Ambae. In addition, two water tanks of 4,000 litres each have also been installed in safe areas. Volunteers in Port Vila have prepared a further 240 family kits which will be dispatched at the earliest opportunity, while VRCS and UNICEF are preparing to send an additional 250 jerry cans (25 litre each). Preparations to purchase additional water containers and tarpaulins in case of an evacuation have been made.

The VRCS is also receiving support from other partners in the region. The Solomon Islands Red Cross disaster management officer is being deployed to Vanuatu to support the VRCS, while a water and sanitation delegate from the New Zealand Red Cross will be deployed on Saturday. In addition, the New Zealand Red Cross has despatched 2000 high quality dust masks which will arrive in Port Vila on Thursday. The Federation's regional delegation has so far contributed USD 2,000 (CHF 2,634) towards operational costs.

As the situation develops further operational support may be considered. Meanwhile the replenishment of relief items will be a priority in order to ensure minimum stock levels during the cyclone season.

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Annex¹



¹ Map by OCHA, courtesy of ReliefWeb.