

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

22 December 2005

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In Brief

This Bulletin (no. 02/2005) 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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The Situation

Mt. Ambae volcano continues to discharge steam, ash and sulphur gases into the air since it first erupted on 27 November 2005 and has displaced thousands of the Ambae island's 10,000 strong population, which is located north of the Vanuatu archipelago. The displaced are spread out in 17 emergency evacuation centres across the island, ranging from about ten people per camp to nearly 800 (please see table in the next section for a list of people per camp).

In Ambae, the local population relies on wells or tanks to collect rain water as there are no rivers or streams in the island. Water is therefore a high priority in this emergency situation, and such a shortage can potentially lead to outbreaks of health-related issues. Risk of contamination is also



Displaced villagers sit under a tree at Longana village on south Ambae (AP Photo/Rick Rycroft).

high if water supplies are not protected appropriately. The provincial authorities have tried to mitigate potential outbreaks by creating health posts at each relocation centre.

There has been a series of small quakes on 10 December. Scientists have also established the formation of a second vent that is pumping up to 10,000 feet of steam into the air, while the first continues to pour ash into the summit's crater lake, Vui. The level of volcanic activity remains unchanged at level 2.

A national disaster management office meeting has been held in Port Vila on 19 December 2005 to discuss findings and long-term options for resettlement. For now, chances of evacuation seem low.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

To date, Red Cross and Red Crescent action in support of the Vanuatu Red Cross Society (VRCS) has consisted of water and sanitation support as well as relief. The Red Cross has been seen as one of the leading agencies providing humanitarian assistance to people at the centres. Relief provided by the VRCS, Federation and its partners include:

- Family kits
- Water tanks
- Tarpaulin
- Organizing and shipping water from Port Vila to Ambae
- Providing cooking utensils for the centre
- Providing appropriate information of humanitarian needs to provincial coordinating committee
- Registration of relocated people

Assessments in the 17 emergency centres (please see table below) around Ambae have also been conducted by a New Zealand Red Cross (NZRC) water and sanitation delegate and a disaster management officer from the Solomon Islands Red Cross (SIRC). Majority of camps are located in schools and problems may arise when schools reopen in six weeks.

#	Relocation Cent res	Male >16yrs	Female >16yrs	Children 1-16yrs	Baby <1yr	Special Needs	Total
1	Arorongo	26	16	10	3		55
2	Nanivele	30	29	57	7	5	121
3	Namboe	25	26	40	2	2	95
4	Lovunivili	28	22	44	1	1	96
5	Longana	25	32	31	5	1	94
6	Narontambe	14	12	16	5	1	48
7	Quirutaru	10	9	12			31
8	Lolopuepue	145	122	147	16		430
9	Ambaebulu	48	61	87		1	197
10	Lovusi	18	8	13			39
11	Vureas	20	29	41			90
12	Saratamata	59	56	48			163
13	Torgil	248	239	270	17		774
14	Loviundau	3	4	5	1		13
15	Wailengi	21	25	50	6	2	104
16	Londua	118	113	214	23	8	476
17	Navuturiki	117	96	210	21	1	445
	total						3271

Table 1: Number of people in each emergency centre on Ambae. These figures were collected two weeks after the relocation.

Out of the 17, three to four centres have been prioritized as needing ongoing assistance and management support, which include Torgil in East Ambae, as well as Londua and Navuturiki in West Ambae.

In Torgil, the assessment team has found that there are insufficient sanitation facilities and water supply for the 700 odd people in this camp. Although there are a number of empty centres nearby, many seem reluctant to move.

However, updates on 21 December 2005 indicate that an undisclosed number of people have begun moving to the nearby centres, thereby easing the overcrowded situation. More pit latrines have also been dug in Torgil. Rain in East Ambae is sufficient for the population's drinking needs.

In West Ambae, the Red Cross is concerned about camps in Londua and Navutiriki. Centre inhabitants are running out of water because of low water moisture levels in the west. While drinking water is being shipped in, the inhabitants are using sea water for washing and in their other daily routines. There have been some logistical constraints delaying the transport of water containers to the western part of the island, which have been resolved for now. The Vanuatu Red Cross Society is also shipping 8 x 200 litres of water to West Ambae with more to follow, along with spades, shovels, extra large cooking pots and plastic bowls for washing hands.

To ease water woes west of the island, the VRCS will deliver a desalination unit funded by the Australian Agency for International Development (AUSAID) to the Nduidui area. The unit will have the capacity to provide 3,000 litres of water per day – enough for drinking and cooking at both emergency camps in West Ambae. It will remain on site until an adequate water supply for the people is available. There is a health clinic in Nduidui.

Only one out of the six boreholes around Ambae has water because of the dry climate and basalt rock terrain. The borehole has not been operational however since cyclone Ivy in 2003, and the Federation and VRCS are looking into rehabilitating it as soon as possible.

Two varieties of water testing kits have been donated or funded by AUSAID and the World Health Organization (WHO) and have been provided to the Vanuatu Red Cross Society, supported by the Federation. The first, Delagua coliform kits, will require training from the NZRC water and sanitation delegate to operate and maintain, which will be given to nominated persons. The second are 100 H2S paper testing kits, which are easier to use and will be distributed in Ambae with the appropriate health education.

Distribution of more family kits in Ambae is being constrained by statistical and logistical issues, but is expected to resume soon. The VRCS and other Red Cross staff/delegate in the operation remain in close contact with the regional delegation.

Recommendations and plans

The Red Cross has identified some possible gaps and areas for further or continuous action during the course of the emergency operation:

- Carry out recommendations to fulfill water and sanitation needs
- Maintain monitoring of the camps' situation and continue providing information
- Move some people from Torgil to other empty camps
- Monitor health situation and plan for health promotion
- Dig additional latrines in West Ambae, Torgil and other centres with large population
- Red Cross field personnel to develop their own action plan
- Continue providing weekly situation reports to VRCS national office to address immediate needs
- Improve coordination and planning on the ground.

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