

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

NIAS: EARTHQUAKE

31 March 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 Information Bulletin (no. 05/2005) is being issued for information only. The Federation is not seeking additional funding from donors for this operation at this time.

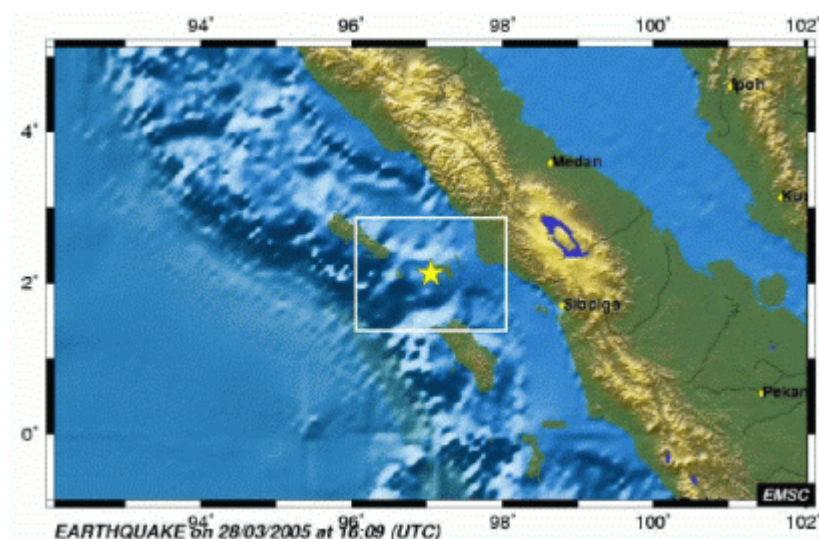
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The Situation

An earthquake measuring up to 8.7 on the Richter scale that devastated the island of Nias in Aceh Province has claimed a confirmed 500 lives and severely damaged concrete buildings and infrastructure. Destroyed roads and bridges on the mainland are hindering logistics and aid to the affected population on Nias, while rubble from toppled buildings is impeding the movement of relief workers on the island. Local residents have begun coming down from their mountain refuge to join the search and rescue. Media reports tell of people sifting through the rubble with their bare hands in hopes of finding missing relatives.



While government sources in Aceh claim the quake damaged 800 buildings and left 40,000 homeless, relief agencies are still waiting to determine the total number of homeless.

Relief efforts are intensifying on Nias island, where relief agencies are using helicopters and boats to deliver much needed aid such as food, medical supplies and tents from Sumatra, as the island's airport was badly damaged in the disaster and is unable to receive large aircrafts. Many agencies are reportedly temporarily diverting aid from Aceh to this emergency.

The most urgent need right now is heavy equipment to remove rubble, as many survivors and bodies remain trapped under collapsed buildings and debris. The government has sent bulldozers, excavators and trucks to the mainland town of Sibolga, and many are awaiting transport from Aceh to the affected areas. Authorities have admitted to difficulties in getting the equipment ashore however.

Water is in short supply, particularly in Gunung Sitoli, where scarce electricity is needed to run the urban water systems and networks. Rural areas have alternative access to water via boreholes and wells. According to UN sources, water purification needs are urgent. There is also a need for food aid. Sporadic scuffles over food have reportedly broken out in Nias.

Several small aftershocks have been registered since the quake, and information received indicate there might be further strong quakes because of the massive tectonic plate movements on 26 December.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

A landing craft carrying equipment for the French and Spanish Red Cross water and sanitation ERUs, shelter and relief equipment, body bags, trucks and four-wheel drive vehicles was dispatched from Meulaboh to the town of Sibolga as the closest point to Nias island.

As the shipment of relief supplies from Sibolga to Nias depends very much on weather conditions (ships cannot cross to Nias in the frequently bad weather and air lifts have to be called in), additional air transportation is being arranged.

Transport, communications and logistics facilities will be fully established over the next few days. A Sibolga - Gunung Sitoli logistics bridge, and warehousing facilities will also be set up. A ship with 1,000-MT loading capacity has been hired to ferry vehicles between Nias and the mainland. A Spanish Red Cross logistics team has been dispatched by road to Sibolga to temporarily assist in managing logistics.

A C-160 aircraft was dispatched from Medan to Nias with PMI supplies and equipment including tents, tarpaulin, bed sheets, water, shelter material, food, body bags and fuel. This aircraft will also be used in medical evacuations on its trip back to Medan.

The PMI, supported by the Federation, assessment team have traveled to outlying areas to carry out search and rescue. PMI have evacuated 292 people by plane to Medan so far.

Currently, 40 PMI volunteers are working in the outlying areas supported by the French Red Cross. The first assessments from these areas indicate that the countryside might have sustained less damage and casualties due to wooden structures, but that the situation might be worse in the town of Teluk Dalam. That is yet to be confirmed.

A temporary base of operations has been set up at the Danish Red Cross camp in Meulaboh. The facility has been put to good use and is serving quite well.

Outstanding needs

There is a need for equipment and supplies to meet the needs of the affected. Urgently required are helicopters and fuel for transportation, shelter and relief materials such as tents, generators, lighting, sleeping mats, food and water, medical and recovery kits, and office equipment.

The initial operational plan of action has been submitted to the Federation's headquarters in Jakarta detailing preliminary needs for personnel, supplies and equipment. All needs in supplies and equipment are presently available in sufficient quantities from the Federation warehouses in Aceh Province and Medan.

Several positions need to be filled to continue operations. These include a head of office, a water and sanitation delegate, a health delegate, a telecommunications delegate, two relief delegates, a logistics delegate, an administration delegate and two general technicians required for Gunung Sitoli, Nias island. A logistics delegate is needed in Sibolga, while Sinabang, Simeulue island is in need of a relief delegate.

The lists above will be updated after the end of the current assessment.

Coordination and information sharing

There is strong cooperation with and between every partner national society (PNS) including the Spanish, Japanese, Singaporean, French and Danish Red Cross societies operating in the area. They share a genuine sense of team spirit, and information is freely exchanged during daily coordination meetings. The French Red Cross has made available a helicopter for the use of the Federation/PNS.

The support from the Federation offices in Jakarta, Bandah Aceh, Medan, Geneva and others has been significant, and characterized by an open willingness to resolve issues by the most efficient means, even after taking into account that they also have to deal with the ongoing tsunami operation.

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