

# 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

30 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. 04/2005) is being issued for information only. The Federation is not seeking additional funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.**

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### The Situation

A massive earthquake struck Northern Sumatra in Indonesia on 28 March 2005, devastating the island of Nias and causing damage on Simeulue island. So far 13 aftershocks between 5.5 and 6.7 have been registered in the wake of the earthquake.

Rescuers have already recovered some 330 bodies, but the PMI now estimates that over 1,000 could have died in Nias alone.

In Simuelue, local health officials say that at least 100 have been accounted dead by now.

Assessment teams continue to survey the affected areas, primarily by overflights. It is expected that the two Federation assessment teams visiting Nias and Simeulue islands respectively will carry enough information to proceed with decision making on further relief, health, logistics and telecom needs.

Information about the situation on the island of Banyak (between Simeulue and Nias) is also starting to reach the mainland Sumatra. According to the initial information gathered by several NGOs currently present on the island, the land might have risen up to 3 metres in certain areas of the island. It is not sure whether access by boat is

possible. A Federation assessment team is scheduled to fly there tomorrow (Thursday), with a helicopter made available by the French Red Cross.

## **Initial response to Nias earthquake - in retrospective**

While Indonesia is currently involved in a second emergency operation within three short months, other countries in the Indian Ocean Basin region are focusing on recovery and rehabilitation planning and activities.

However, the nature of the latest Nias earthquake prompted tsunami alerts across countries affected by the earthquake of 26 December 2004. For the first time, early warning systems and other governmental and non-governmental disaster preparedness initiatives put in place following the tragedy were tested.

In Thailand and Malaysia, where heavy tremors were felt during the earthquake, populations vulnerable to possible tsunami were immediately alerted and where necessary, evacuated.

The Government of India issued a tsunami warning through the media to coastal areas including the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, where tremors were also felt. In Tamil Nadu some people were evacuated to higher areas in the main land. The emergency control room of the Ministry of Home Affairs was reactivated and military forces were put on high alert and standby.

In the Maldives, the government issued a nationwide alert via the media and a national disaster management centre was fully activated. Residents in Male reportedly barricaded seaside homes with sandbags, indicating a high level of awareness of the breaking news.

## **Response preparedness by Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in the region**

The earthquake has triggered a region-wide Red Cross and Red Crescent response, with the Federation and national societies mobilizing volunteers, staff and resources to assist in the ensuing emergency as needed.

### **East Africa**

Disaster preparedness initiatives adopted in East Africa after the 26 December tsunami have made a difference and have contributed to the rapid Red Cross response across the region. These initiatives include a learning review conducted in mid-January, commitment to early warning and disaster preparedness systems, and the 10-point Nairobi Initiative. Constant efforts are being made to improve preparedness and response region wide.

The response began with the issue of an alert by the **Federation regional delegation to all Red Cross and Red Crescent societies** and their local government counterparts on the East Africa coast and on Indian Ocean islands. Within 90 minutes of the first warning, the national societies of Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Djibouti, Mauritius, Seychelles, Comoros and the French Red Cross Platform for Regional Intervention in the Indian Ocean Islands (PIROI) in Reunion and their branches on the coast were informed and prepared.

In Somalia, BBC Somalia news service relayed the **Somali Red Crescent Society** Secretary-General's message for communities to be aware of risks and adopt safety measures.

Communication lines between the Federation regional delegation and national societies have been consistently open, relaying information on the possible direction of the tsunami and follow up checks on damage and casualties. The only reported impact was in Mauritius where a wave of 1.5 metres high washed up the coast of the Mauritius mainland, but did not cause notable damage.

### **South East Asia**

In Thailand, the **Thai Red Cross Society** and its branches assisted evacuations in coastal areas and continues to monitor the situation.

Responding to the earthquake and the need for medical assistance, the **Singapore Red Cross** has just sent a medical team consisting of a Red Cross staff member and a volunteer doctor. Another team, led by a volunteer

trained in regional disaster response (RDRT) will be deployed on 31 March. The national society is communicating with PMI and the Federation, and remains on standby to assist.

In Malaysia, the **Malaysian Red Crescent Society** staff and volunteers trained in Regional Disaster Response have been put on stand-by and are still available for immediate deployment if needed. The national society will deploy two RDRT-trained members to Nias Island in response to the official request made by the Malaysian government for these members to join the Malaysian search, rescue and assessment contingent.

In response to the Nias earthquake, the **Federation regional delegation based in South East Asia** has been quick in facilitating assistance and communications between the tsunami affected areas region-wide. The Federation's regional disaster risk management unit (RDMU) has alerted all RDRT members in the region; 25 members have responded and 15 are ready for immediate deployment. The RDMU is also coordinating alerts with the regional disaster management committee through the chair of the sub-group for disaster response, who maintains constant communication with the Federation structure in Bangkok and in Indonesia.

### **South Asia**

The **Indian Red Cross Society's** disaster management team was on alert and standby until well after midnight. Telephone communications were initiated by the IRCS' joint secretary with state and district branches along the coastal areas such as Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Nagapptinam, Kannyakumari. In Tamil Nadu, Red Cross volunteers and branch personnel provided assistance to evacuees in close coordination with local authorities. It was noted that the preparedness level of both the government the national society had improved compared to that of 26 December 2004.

The **Sri Lanka Red Cross Society** showed an even greater level of disaster preparedness than prior to the 26 December event. With newly recruited volunteers and fresh experience, the branches close to the coast have alerted the local population that found refuge on higher grounds.

Staff and volunteers of the Sri Lanka Red Cross have been on stand-by with ambulances, ready to respond to community needs as the situation developed.

**Federation country delegations** in India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives as well as the **Federation regional delegation** alerted all other partner national societies present in the region and coordinated the information flow.

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