

# 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

## SOUTH AMERICA: EMERGENCIES

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*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 185 countries.*

### In Brief

**This Bulletin is being issued for information only, and reflects the situation and the information available at this time. The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.**

**The International Federation undertakes activities that are aligned with its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to achieve the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".**

#### **Global Agenda Goals:**

- **Reduce the number of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.**
- **Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.**
- **Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.**
- **Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.**

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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 Organizations \(NGO's\) 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 / Red Cross action**

A number of emergencies have arisen across South America since the start of the year. Most of these are linked to the onset of the rainy season, which lasts until May. So far heavy rains have affected Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil and Peru causing floods and landslides. Emergencies of a different nature have also occurred in January. In Chile, a seismic wave is being monitored in the south of the country. In Paraguay, a health emergency has hit the country

in the form of a dengue outbreak affecting several provinces. Although not all countries in the region are mentioned in this bulletin, the emergencies reported are those which have had a significant impact. The following is an outline of the countries which have been affected since the beginning of the year.

### **Argentina**

In Argentina, heavy rains and storms have been registered in the north of the country in the Provinces of Tucuman, Santiago del Estero and Salta. In two days, 200 mm of rain were registered, the average for the entire month of January. The ground has been saturated and river levels have increased rapidly causing riverside flooding. The heavy rains have caused five fatalities, the evacuation of 5,000 people (of which 200 remain evacuated) and 60,000 people have been affected. Material damage has been caused by the emergency as people have lost homes, electricity was temporarily cut off, bridges were destroyed and livestock has been lost. Soy and strawberry plantations have also been affected. Economic losses are calculated at USD 30 million (some CHF 37, 3 million). As regards health, increased cases of colds, influenza and diarrhoea have been registered so far.

The Argentine Red Cross is working through its branches and carrying out local appeals and distributing humanitarian aid. In the city of Tucuman, a National Intervention Team is working on the evaluation and formulation of a Plan of Action focusing on recuperation and post emergency needs. Information and resources are also being exchanged with organizations and agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), Action against Hunger, Save the Children, Caritas and the Argentine Ministry of Social Development to identify joint and complementary actions.

### **Bolivia**

Torrential rains in Bolivia over the last few months have caused floods affecting communities in seven out of nine departments, causing the loss of eight lives and affecting over 14,978 families, according to the Bolivian Civil Defence. The departments affected are Cochabamba, Santa Cruz, La Paz, Potosi, Chuquisaca, Tarija and Beni. This prompted the Government to declare a National State of Emergency on 18 January and to distribute aid to those affected. The floods have led to economic losses as crops have been destroyed and roads have been damaged, the total sum of which is yet to be calculated. Last week, strong winds and an electric storm seriously damaged 50 precarious homes and affected at least 75 rural families. Forecasts predict that rains will intensify in the coming months.

The National Disaster Relief Unit of the Bolivian Red Cross has sent a communication to all departmental and provincial branches to continue monitoring and evaluating the impacts of the heavy rain. The branches in Cochabamba, Tarija, Potosi, La Paz, Chuquisaca and Santa Cruz are participating in the departmental Emergency Operating Committees' meetings to coordinate activities. On 24 January, the branch of Tarija in coordination with the local mayor and television channel 9, organized the collection and distribution of humanitarian aid to communities affected by the rains in the region of El Puente. The National Society is coordinating with United Nations agencies, who have requested the Civil Defence to set up a dialogue of donors and to share information on the needs of the families affected.

### **Brazil**

During the past month in Brazil, heavy rains have caused floods and landslides in the States of Rio de Janeiro and Minas Gerais in Southeast Brazil, leading to the death of at least 44 people. The rains have damaged homes and affected the local population. Most of the fatalities happened in the mountainous regions of Minas Gerais and Rio de Janeiro, where houses built in areas of risk were destroyed by landslides. According to information from the national Civil Defence, Rio de Janeiro has been the worst affected State. The dislodgement of mud from the Muriae River already left two districts of Itaperuna, a city with 88,000 inhabitants, without water supply. The mud has also caused severe damage to homes. As a result of these heavy rains, in the State of Rio de Janeiro 5,697 people have lost their homes and 6,143 have been temporarily displaced and are currently staying with friends or relatives. The State of Minas Gerais has suffered from heavy rains since October 2006, which have killed 18 people and left 80 injured.

Since the onset of the emergency, the Brazilian Red Cross (BRC) has been working to support those affected. The branches of the affected municipalities in the State of Rio de Janeiro responded to the disaster by carrying out search and rescue activities and transporting at-risk population to safer ground in ambulance and supporting those affected by the heavy rains through the distribution of humanitarian aid (such as clothing) at shelters in coordination with Civil Defence. On request of the National Society, a Disaster Management Delegate from the Pan-American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU) was immediately deployed to Brazil to support the Brazilian Red Cross and its branches in the assessment, coordination and development of the Plan of Action. After preliminary evaluations of needs of the affected population and of the situation on the ground, the National Society decided to request support from the Federation's DREF fund for a total of CHF 95,000 to support the Plan of Action and respond to the needs of 750 families affected by the floods and landslides.

## Chile

In Chile, after a week of persistent earth tremors in the region of Aysen in the south of the country, meteorologists have carried out investigations into the reasons behind the recent intense seismic activity. Over 200 tremors have been registered - rated between 3 and 6 on the Mercalli scale - causing insecurity amongst local communities. Authorities have called for calm and have issued an early warning in order to ensure close coordination and communication between members of the Civil Protection Committee, made up of the police force, the health service, the Chilean Red Cross and the Government of Aysen.

The Chilean Red Cross branch in Puerto Aysen have participated in the Local Emergency Committee which is preparing for any eventuality and that the administration of temporary shelters would be carried out by the National Society. At the same time, the National Relief department of the National Society have maintained permanent communication with the branch in the area and have mapped out the probable needs in the case of further events and considering that the area is only accessible by boat or plane. The branch in Puerto Aysen has 25-30 volunteers to support and carry out activities.

## Paraguay

In January, Paraguay has faced an epidemiological emergency due to the cross-country presence of the *Aedes Aegyptis* mosquito, which carries the virus that causes dengue. By the end of December 2006, the total number of confirmed cases of people with dengue in the country was 366. By January, the number of cases increased to 1,873, as confirmed by the Ministry of Public Health. An epidemiological alert has been issued and there is the possibility of an outbreak of the fatal hemorrhagic strain of the virus, which to date has killed three people. Hospitals are strained attending those who have been infected with the virus and those who are suspected of being infected. The capital city of Asuncion still has the highest number of cases (78 percent of the total) yet the departments of Central, Amambay, Alto Parana, Cordillera, Guaira and Paraguari are also affected.

To this effect, on Monday 29 January the government mobilized 25,000 public officials, 60,000 teachers, military personnel, members of the police force and members of the Fire Brigade who, along with the Paraguayan Red Cross (PRC) and students who tool to the streets of Paraguay to carry out the clean-up operation and raise awareness through a campaign. Argentina has also been on alert and after a meeting between the Health Ministers of Argentina and Paraguay, a decision was made to intensify prevention measures and sanitary control across the shared border.

The Paraguayan Red Cross (PRC) mobilized volunteers to support the clean up day planned by the Ministry of Public Health. The National Society's twelve regional branches were alerted to this mobilization, with a priority focus on the five borders with neighbouring countries; Itapúa, Concepción, Ñeembucu, Alto Paraná and Amambay. A publicity campaign via mass media is being prepared for the prevention of dengue and for the voluntary donation of blood. A Plan of Action is being prepared for communities in Asuncion, Greater Asuncion and Central Asuncion, under the slogan "safe communities are the healthiest." This Plan will be extended to five high-risk regional branches, and to other branches that wish to take part. From Monday 29 January, two medical attention centres have been set up at the Mother and Child Hospital, which is run and owned by the Paraguayan Red Cross, to assess and treat both children and adults on a 24-hour basis.

In order to support the PRC Plan of Action in responding to the emergency, CHF 50,000 has been allocated from the International Federation's Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF). On Sunday 28 January, a Disaster Management Delegate from PADRU was deployed to support the PRC in developing the Plan of Action. A member of the Regional Intervention Team (RIT) specialized in public health will be mobilized to Paraguay in the following days.

## Peru

In Peru, heavy rains over the last month have led to flooding and landslides across the country affecting communities in the departments of Cusco, Huancavelica, Huanuco, Junin, La Libertad, Pasco and San Martin. Peruvian Civil Defence has been working in all departments to respond to the situation and working in coordination with humanitarian aid organizations.

**The table below shows the number of people affected, injured or disappeared and the number of lost lives:**

Name of Department	Number of people directly affected	Number of people affected	Number of people injured	Number of fatalities	Number of disappeared
Cusco	-	510	-	-	-
Huancavelica	31	450	-	-	-
Huanuco	2,058	8,947	-	-	-
Junin	1,758	1,371	10	8	7
La Libertad	75	-	-	-	-
Pasco	368	400	1	2	-
San Martin	2,125	36,025	-	-	-
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6,415</b>	<b>47,703</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>

*Those directly affected are considered by Civil Defence as those whose homes or constructions have been destroyed.*

The Peruvian Red Cross has been working with branches located in the areas affected by the heavy rains. In the department of Junin, which has been affected by landslides and flooding, the National Society has carried out activities such as search and rescue, community first aid, registration of people affected in different communities, provision of volunteers to support the Civil Defence in the distribution of donations and setting up a Red Cross tent next to temporary shelters to provide basic health care. In addition, the branch of Chanchamayo is working with the Centre of Emergency Operations on the operations and health commissions and branch personnel are present at evaluations. In addition, a Regional Intervention Team (RIT) member travelled to Peru in early January to strengthen the capacities of the branches of Mariscal Caceres (in the city of Juanjui, department of San Martin) and Maynas in the city of Iquitos in emergency evaluations, internal and inter-institutional coordination and the preparation of reports. In Juanjui, distributions of humanitarian items such as drinking water, mosquito nets, medicine and clothes took place. The RIT has extended the mission in Peru and will visit Chanchamayo affected by floods and landslides in Junin and this week distributions of clothes, Wellington boots and mosquito nets to those most in need.



*In Peru, rising water levels due to rain have led to flooding*

The negative impact of the rainy season in South America last year was widespread, affecting Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru. National Societies in each of these countries received support from the Federation's DREF to support communities affected by heavy rains. This year, National Societies are already facing emergency situations, and are preparing for resulting events. The Lima Regional Delegation is also in permanent contact with the National Societies in the region to ensure support during these and any other emergencies.

### **Federation coordination**

Coordination is crucial to ensure the most effective use of available resources. The Federation, as one of the main organizations engaged in disaster response activities on an international scale, works to ensure close coordination of its activities with donors, agencies, NGOs, public institutions and regional actors such as the Andean Community for Disaster Prevention and Attention (CAPRADE) and PAHO.

From the outset of the emergencies, the Regional Delegation and PADRU are working closely with the National Societies in the region, providing special support in monitoring and coordination. In order to avoid duplication and to maximize resources the Federation shares information with external partners and Partner National Societies (PNS) in the field.

Two Disaster Management delegates from PADRU have been deployed to Brazil and Peru to work with the respective National Societies. In addition, two RIT members have been mobilized to support the Plans of Action of the Brazilian and Peruvian Red Cross Societies. A third RIT will be deployed to Paraguay in the coming days.

In order to respond to the priorities as defined by the network of Directors of Disaster Relief from the 10 National Societies in South America, the Lima Regional Delegation, PADRU and the five National Societies of the Andean subregion will hold a Preparatory Technical Meeting on contingency plans and in preparation for the El Niño phenomenon, which will be held in Lima, Peru in February 2007. This meeting seeks the preparation of contingency plans, in coordination with other actors, to respond to the El Niño phenomenon within the framework for “Guidance for the preparation of response and contingency plans” recently published by the Federation. It is hoped that as a result of the meeting, a regional strategy which proposes an outline to strengthen preparation capacities of the Red Cross, coordination between National Societies and other organisations working in the region is developed.

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