

# Information bulletin



International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

## Hungary: Chemical Spill

Information bulletin n° 1

13 October 2010

Glide n° AC-2010-000197-HUN

This bulletin is being issued for information only, and reflects the current situation and details available at this time. The Hungarian Red Cross, having consulted the competent Hungarian authorities and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), has determined that external assistance is not required, and is therefore not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for the time being.

The surrounded settlements of the town of *Ajka*, Western Hungary, were hit by a red sludge spill caused by an industrial accident on Monday, October 4, 2010. The estimated total affected area rises to 800-1016 hectares, nine people were killed according to official reports.



Hungarian Red Cross volunteers are participating in rescue activities in cooperation with authorities. **Photo:** Hungarian Red Cross

The contaminated sludge was flowing into streams thereby putting at risk the rivers Raba and Danube. Authorities started disinfecting the streams with plaster to restore a normal PH value.

The sludge flood reached 40 residential properties and 2 municipality-owned buildings in two streets of the village of *Kolontár*, as well as 244 residential properties in 19 streets of the town of *Devecser* and 14 residential properties in the village of *Somlóvásárhely*, affecting altogether some 7,000 people.

State of emergency has been declared in the affected areas on 6<sup>th</sup> October, and Government of Hungary appointed Disaster Relief Commissioner to control the situation.

The Hungarian Red Cross has been working together with the local administration in the region to respond to the disaster by conducting evacuation and emergency assistance.

To date, the Hungarian Red Cross continues to conduct activities for the displaced people in the affected areas, and it is monitoring the changing situation for developments. Also National Society started nationwide fundraising campaign immediately after the red sludge flooded the settlements

[<click here to go to map, and here for detailed contact information>](#)

## The Situation

An ecological disaster took place on October 4, 2010 at 1:30 p.m. when the western dam of cassette No. 10 of the sludge reservoir, belonging to a privately owned company, Magyar Alumínium ZRt (Hungarian Aluminum Co), ruptured. Due to the ruptured dam, a mixture of 600-700 thousand m<sup>3</sup> of red sludge and water inundated the lower sections of the settlements of Kolontár, Devecser and Somlovasarhely via the Torna creek.

Forces of fire brigades, police, 7 CBRN units, disaster management and the civil protection were deployed to the area. Evacuation of the affected population and measures to prevent serious environmental damage has taken place to the required extent. The on-site rescue operations are supervised by the National Directorate General for Disaster Management. The contaminated water has meanwhile reached the River Marcal. Water management experts are continuously following the flow of the sludge and are coordinating with the downstream water management directorates. The decontamination of the affected areas and rivers – Tarna and Marcal – continued by bringing 400 tons of calcium-nitrate and magnesium-nitrate and 1,000 tons of gypsum into the river, also to prevent the contamination of the Danube.

The Hungarian Minister of Interior has been appointed to coordinate this crisis. The National Directorate General for Disaster Management (the Civil Protection authority) has the operational lead. At the local level, a Crisis Committee has been created, comprising all the service lines and authorities involved in the action: Civil Protection as the leader, fire fighters, police, army, ambulance service, mayors, Hungarian Red Cross. The evacuated people are taken care of at the sports centre of Ajka.

A large section of the northern dam of cassette No. 10 of the sludge reservoir is still showing signs of ruptures. Consequently it means a continuing risk for another possible spill out. The Hungarian Government has taken measures to construct dikes around the cassettes and on protecting Kolontár in the event of a worst case scenario. The construction of the rock-filled dikes is finished. The dam reinforcement has been finalized along its entire 1050 meter length.

According to the respective data the pH level of the soil monitored has not yet reached the critical level. Bodies of fish floating on the surface at scattered intervals originate from the contaminated stretch of the Marcal River.

Laurent de Pierrefeu, the EU MIC liaison officer has already started the preparation activities, and a mission of the EU expert team has arrived in Hungary.<sup>1</sup>

## Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The Hungarian Red Cross has been actively responding to the chemical spill since the early moments of this accident. Hungarian Red Cross (HRC) has mobilized a team of 50 volunteers nationwide.

The National Headquarters are in constant contact with the branches and are providing information and technical support. Volunteers have been mobilized to support the affected people in managing shelters, providing meals, first aid and evacuation logistics.

150 stretchers, 150 blankets, 300 pieces of tinned food, 2 vanloads of mineral water have been delivered to worst affected settlements, Kolontár and Devecser.

The Hungarian Red Cross staff and volunteers are helping the evacuation and the provision of evacuees. The organization has started the creation of a temporary shelter in Várpalota and offered its holiday resort in Balatonlelle for the accommodation of evacuees. Since the affected population has chosen to stay with relatives, the temporary shelter in Várpalota has been suspended.

The authorities have provided 500 nose-and-mouth masks to the Hungarian Red Cross team, which are being distributed to people at risk, as well as protective glasses, gloves and rubber boots.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://redsludge.bm.hu/>

Representatives of the Red Cross have been participating in disaster management daily coordination meetings with the government and other organizations. Hungarian Red Cross has been in regular contact with the IFRC's Europe Zone office.

Communication staff from IFRC Zone office visited the field within the first 24 hours of the disaster and interviewed Red Cross staff, volunteers and affected population. Two articles have been immediately posted to the [www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org) website.<sup>2</sup> The Europe zone communication office members also answered questions.

With the emergency phase ending, and most people sheltering with relatives, Hungarian Red Cross plans turn to the recovery stage. Other aid organizations have arrived, and coordination is paramount. The National Society has begun a nationwide fundraising campaign in order to raise resources to serve the needs of the affected population.

In less than a week HUF 130 million has been collected through hot line operated by the major telephone service providers in Hungary. Since 5 October 2010 648,000 persons have called or sent SMS messages to the hot line, contributing HUF 200 each to the Hungarian Red Cross relief program. The entire collection of money will be used for those who have been affected by the disaster to distribute non-perishable food, mineral water, detergents, and toiletries for them.

The International Federation is following up the situation closely with the National Society. Early next week another update will be issued.

## How we work

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 the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

The IFRC's vision is to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by National Societies, with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.

The IFRC's work is guided by [Strategy 2020](#) which puts forward three strategic aims:

1. Save lives, protect livelihoods, and strengthen recovery from disaster and crises.
2. Enable healthy and safe living.
3. Promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace.

## Contact information

**For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:**

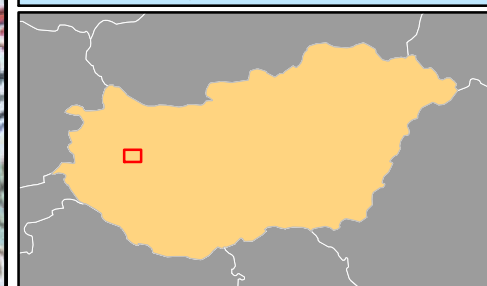
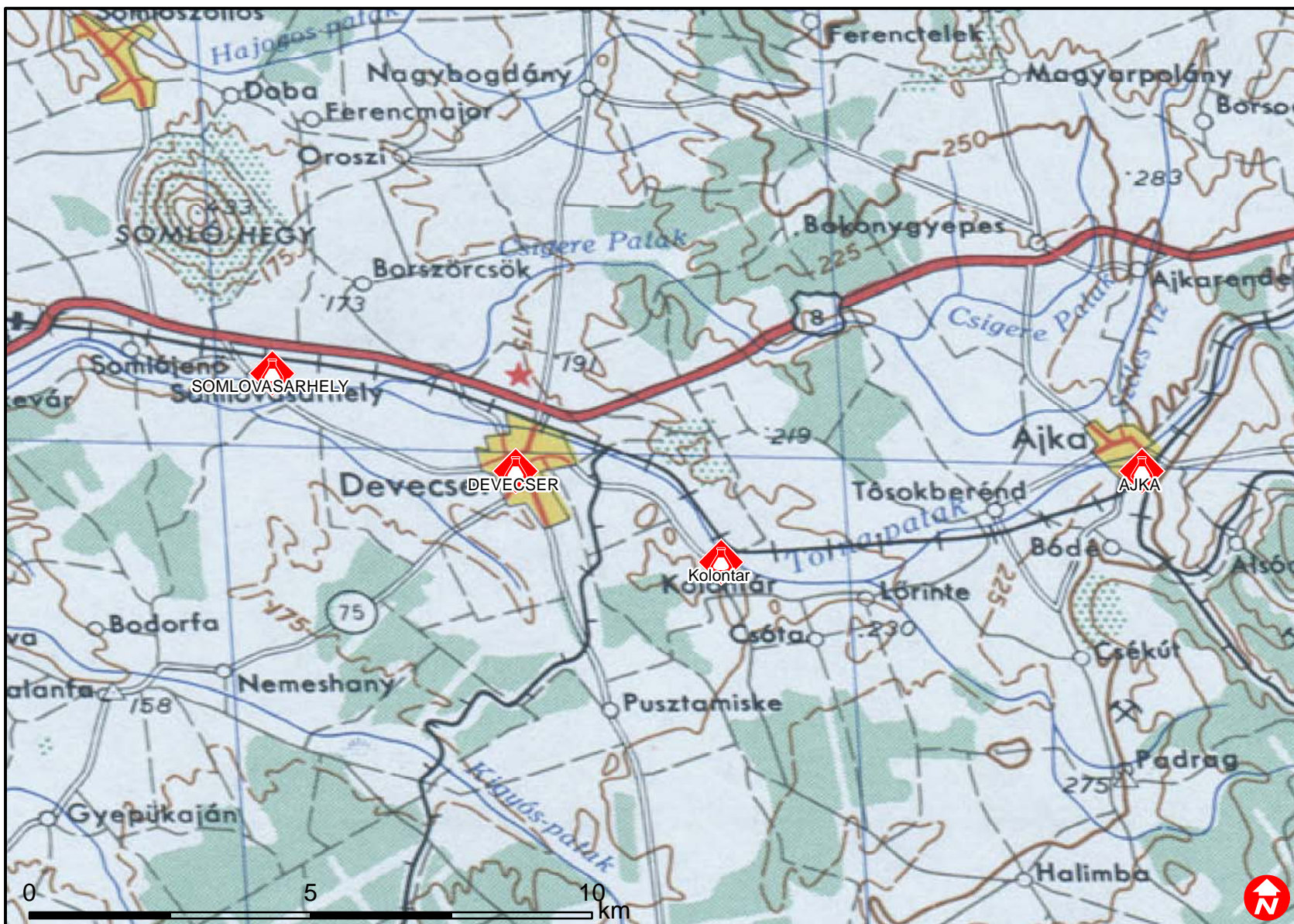
- **In Hungary:** Erik Selymes, Director General, Hungarian Red Cross, phone:+36 1 374 1380; email: [intdept@voroskereszt.hu](mailto:intdept@voroskereszt.hu)
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[< click here to go to map, and here to return to the title page or contact information >](#)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ifrc.org/Docs/News/10/10100501/index.asp>  
<http://www.ifrc.org/docs/news/10/10100601/index.asp>



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Affected places

Note: Background map is a 1959 map produced by U.S. Army Map Service. It is available here: [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/ams/western\\_europe/txu-oclc-6472044-nl33-3.jpg](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/ams/western_europe/txu-oclc-6472044-nl33-3.jpg)