

Central Africa: Regional Delegation and Republic of Congo

28 August 1997

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period covered: July and August 1997

The context

Following the outbreak of armed conflict in Brazzaville on 5 June, the Regional Delegation for Central Africa was evacuated to Kinshasa in the following week. The Delegation lost all fixed assets except for five vehicles and a satellite phone when its office and all delegates' residences were looted. The headquarters of Congolese Red Cross Society (CRCS) were completely destroyed and all equipment and fixed assets stolen. The fighting caused an estimated 200,000 people to flee to the south-west of the country.

Latest events

Since there appears to be little hope of peace in the near future, a reduced Regional Delegation (down from seven to five members) has been temporarily set up in Kinshasa, alongside the Federation's country delegation. It comprises the acting Head of the Regional Delegation, the Regional delegate for Finance/Administration and one delegate each for DPP, Relief and CBFA.

The Regional Delegation and CRCS maintain contact by portable radio. CRCS staff and the Delegation's local personnel in Brazzaville make regular visits to the Federation's Delegation in Kinshasa to facilitate co-operation between the National Society and the Federation.

More than 300,000 people have now left Brazzaville for their home villages, the majority moving towards Pointe-Noire. The population of this city and the surrounding areas has taken in most of these displaced, and national and international organisations are helping the existing structures to cope with the influx. The Federation has reinforced its delegation in Pointe-Noire with a relief administrator.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Regional Delegation •

Developments in Central Africa -- repeated mutinies in Central African Republic, growing tensions in Gabon and in connection with elections in Cameroon -- call for a strong and well

functioning Federation presence in the region, in order to assist the National Societies affected by the repercussions. To review the situation, the Secretariat convened a meeting in Douala, Cameroon, on 30 and 31 July for the National Societies concerned.

The Presidents and the Secretaries General of Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad and Republic of Congo took part (the National Societies of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Gabon could not attend). The meeting decided on a framework for action aiming specifically at increased preparedness, but also at developing programmes to address the underlying causes of instability, such as increasing poverty, inadequate basic services and growing ethnic tensions in most of the countries. Specific emphasis was put on the institutional basis of each programme, comprising not only headquarters, but the regional and local branches in each National Society. As a new element Youth programmes were discussed to create a "Culture of Peace". A committee for the follow-up of all decisions was created. (The Emergency Appeal for 1998 will be based on these priorities.)

The search for a suitable location for the Federation's Regional Delegation continues; proposals will be discussed with the National Societies of the region at their next meeting, end October in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Displaced People in Pointe-Noire •

With the support of all the members of the Congolese Red Cross in the area, a thorough evaluation of needs was carried out in order to identify the most vulnerable, and to establish co-operation with the governmental and traditional authorities in the villages and towns concerned. Although the evaluation showed that most of displaced are being accommodated by families and friends, all agencies and authorities involved are certain that assistance to the host families will be needed very soon.

Two Federation delegates based in Pointe-Noire are assisting CRCS in organising a relief operation for the 50,000 most vulnerable people amongst the displaced. CRCS plans to distribute 1,200 mt of cereals, 360 mt of beans, 75 mt of vegetable oil and 15 mt of salt to beneficiaries in Pointe-Noire, Dolisie, Sibiti and Nkayi.

WFP has promised to provide most of the food aid, while the Federation will assist with non-food items (2,500 blankets, 10 mt of soap and used clothes). CRCS will carry out the distribution, using its regional committee and more than 60 CRCS volunteers. Since the regional committee is already running the operation for 5,000 Angolan refugees in this area, it has qualified and experienced human resources, who are training members from the newly involved regions. Special consideration has to be given to the security situation in this area.

The Regional Delegation in Kinshasa is co-ordinating CRCS/ Federation assistance. It is facilitating communication with CRCS headquarters in Brazzaville and negotiating co-operation with WFP whose representative is located in Kinshasa. Regional delegates will provide specific technical assistance, as needed.

The Head of Regional Delegation a.i. maintains regular contacts with the ICRC Delegation in Kinshasa; the ICRC is operating in Brazzaville and in the North of the Republic of Congo.

Outstanding needs

Regional Delegation •

The re-establishment of the Regional Delegation first in Kinshasa, and later in another capital city of the region, requires basic office and communications equipment, furniture for the office and for delegates' accommodation. All items can be purchased locally.

A new Head of Regional Delegation and a new Regional Delegate for Institutional and Resource Development are urgently required.

Congolese Red Cross Society in Brazzaville •

As soon as the fighting ceases, the National Society will need considerable assistance in re-establishing its national headquarters. All items can be purchased in the region.

Displaced People in Pointe-Noire •

Targeted distributions to the families hosting the 50,000 most vulnerable displaced persons will be carried out in the next two months with the objective of preventing severe food shortages in the region of Pointe-Noire. Dry rations will be distributed once a month in the city as well as in the villages: 1,650 mt of food are required. The Federation plans to assist with blankets, soap, used clothes and one WHO emergency kit.

Negotiations with WFP are under way in order to use WFP stocks in Pointe-Noire. ECHO has agreed that funds originally earmarked for Rwandan refugees can be used to cover part of the expenditure for expatriate and local personnel, non-food items, the medical kit, some transport and warehousing costs. These two donations should cover about 90 % of these items. However, since the WFP donation is not finalised, and as the security situation in Pointe-Noire may deteriorate after the President ends his term of office on 30 August, it is not yet possible to give a precise cash figure for needs. Updated information will be given as soon as available.

Budget for the Regional Delegation:	195.250.-- CHF
Rent and basic equipment for office and housing,	172,750.-- CHF
Additional travel costs till end of 1997	15,000.-- CHF
Regional co-operation	7,500.--CHF

Budget for Congolese Red Cross:	200,000.-- CHF
Reconstruction of headquarters and basic office equipment	

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Since his arrival in Kinshasa in late July, the Head of Regional Delegation a.i. has re-established regular consultations with UN agencies, including representatives of UNHCR, WFP, and UNDP, which are now based in Kinshasa.

The operation in Pointe-Noire has been planned in close co-operation with the municipal authorities and village officials.

Contributions

The hoped-for 90% coverage referred to above concerns only the Pointe-Noire operation. All costs for the CRCS and the Regional Delegation need to be found and contributions are required in cash.

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