

SOUTH EAST ASIA: TYPHOON LINDA

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The Disaster

Typhoon Linda swept across the Mekong Delta at the southern tip of Vietnam and over the Gulf of Thailand on 2 November wreaking death and destruction on Vietnam. As it proceeded into Tanintharyi State in Myanmar the next day, heavy rain fell but the devastating force had greatly diminished so little damage appears to have occurred.

The overall death toll and full extent of the devastation are currently unknown due to the difficulty in accounting for those at sea and lost in the chaos caused by this typhoon. Media reports are placing the number dead in Vietnam at over 150 but thousands remain unaccounted for - especially those who were out at sea during the storm.

Typhoon Linda is currently in the Bay of Bengal after having passed over the Andaman Islands about 00h00 GMT on 5 November. Satellite images and meteorological predictions indicate that it may hit landfall near the India coast by Calcutta or the Patuakhali area of Bangladesh on 7 November.

Meteorological services in Indonesia and Malaysia have reported that Typhoon Linda has pushed the smog/haze back over many areas that were seriously affected during the past several weeks. In addition, as it gained strength and pulled in moisture, the chance of rainfall in Indonesia, where the fires still rage, diminished (*see Indonesia Smog/Haze Appeal launched 3 November*).

A further threat, Super Typhoon Keith, with winds up to 160 knots per hour, is heading in a westerly direction, south and east of Japan. However, based upon current predictions, it will turn north and then easterly, avoiding landfall. Cyclone Martin has formed in the southern Pacific and has already badly affected the Cook Islands (*see Information Bulletin 01 issued today, 5 November*). The meteorological service in Fiji has sent out warnings to ships in the area to be aware of high seas.

Typhoons at this time of year are uncommon in Asia. However, many parts of the world are experiencing unusual weather-related phenomena - including Papua New Guinea (*see Drought Appeal launched 28 October*), Australia, Indonesia, China, parts of Africa and the Americas.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Vietnam: Preliminary statistics have been compiled (annex 1) by the Vietnam Red Cross (VNRC) branches. Still incomplete due to the complexities of information-gathering in this type of disaster,

these data give a picture of the typhoon's serious effect on the nine coastal provinces in the Mekong Delta. A VNRC board meeting, scheduled for 7-8 November, has been postponed so attention can be focused on the relief operation. The Secretary General has cut short his trip to central Vietnam to go to Ho Chi Minh City to assess and co-ordinate the relief operation with the Second office. The VNRC headquarters has released the local currency equivalent of CHF 19,500 to provide beneficiaries with urgently needed food and non-food stocks. Disaster relief supplies, from stock-piles in the VNRC Second office (medical kits, blankets, cooking utensils etc.) are being distributed in Ca Mau, Bac Lieu, Kien Giang, Ben Tre, Tien Giang, and Tra Vinh.

The International Federation's Head of the Vietnam Delegation, is making an early return from a workshop in Geneva today (Wednesday), to assist and support the VNRC. The regional disaster preparedness delegate is travelling to Vietnam tomorrow (6 November) from Phnom Penh (where she is conducting a disaster preparedness assessment). They will be joined in Ho Chi Minh City by the disaster preparedness delegate, who had just completed his assignment in Vietnam. Arrangements are being made for a suitably-equipped information delegate to travel to the affected areas, with the intention of posting coverage on the *Direct from the Field* Internet site, which can be reached via the International Federation's home page at <http://www.ifrc.org>.

Myanmar: Utilising tracking data on the Internet, the International Federation Secretariat was able to advise the Myanmar Red Cross Society (MRCS) that Typhoon Linda was expected to cross into Myanmar shortly. The MRCS quickly contacted the relief ministry and alerted its branches in Tanintharyi State. Staff and volunteers were on standby as the typhoon passed over but reported little if any need to provide relief assistance beyond the government activity. Throughout the high-risk period, the MRCS and ministry remained in close contact and exchanged pertinent information.

Bangladesh: The Bangladesh Red Crescent Society Cyclone Preparedness Programme is on alert and monitoring the situation closely as warning signal number 1 has been posted.

Needs

The VNRC has asked all paid staff and volunteers to contribute cash and goods in-kind to assist the victims of Typhoon Linda. Further assessments of needs are underway.

Additional information is being gathered from all the countries impacted by this typhoon. At this point, it is unknown what, if any, international assistance will be required. The International Federation's Asia Pacific department will ensure all interested parties are kept informed as events unfold. A regional appeal related to the extreme seasonal changes will be included in the *Emergency Appeal '98*. These funds will assist a number of countries in preparing for and responding to weather-related disasters.

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