

Papua New Guinea: Drought/Enga Province Resettlement/Tribal Fighting

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The Disaster

The Federation and Papua New Guinea Red Cross Society (PNGRCS) is attempting to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable in the strife-torn Enga Province, which has also been hit by drought, frost and forest fires. A project to resettle 500 families in Mariant district in the Kandep region of Enga Province was recently started after detailed consultations with the Provincial Drought Committee, clan leaders and local officials. Unfortunately, tribal fighting has escalated and the Red Cross operation has become a target. Clansmen from the Kandep Station attacked the Red Cross warehouse last week but were repelled by the local police squad. Then clansmen from the Mariant area, (targeted for the second stage of the distribution successfully commenced on 10 May) fearing relief destined for them was in danger, launched a counter attack and looted 320 out of 500 family packs and 300 x 20kg bags of rice. On 14 May additional fighters from both sides gathered and a Mobile Police riot squad was dispatched from Mount Hagen to maintain order.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Attempts by the Federation Relief Delegate (who had relocated on May 12 before fighting erupted) to return to Kandep were blocked by unrest along the main road. The Federation Head of Delegation travelled to Mount Hagen where after discussions with Police Commanders and Provincial officials it was decided to try to land a helicopter at Kandep Station and arrange a meeting with clan leaders. The HoD, Relief Delegate and an AusAID agriculture consultant were met by an angry mob in Kandep, but after presenting a pig to the chiefs -- a gesture of peace in the area -- the situation became calmer.

It is estimated that it will take about CHF 40,500 and four weeks to rebuild the operation to the point it was at, with no guarantees that a repeat will not happen. In addition the Governor has suspended all relief operations in the Province claiming that the drought is over and additional deliveries merely fuel the tribal conflict.

The Federation was able to remove capital assets from Kandep on the helicopter return flight and await the results of local discussions before reviewing the future of operations in Enga. The Relief Delegate has been relocated to Port Moresby until the mood in the region modifies and in any case will end his mission at the end of May. The HoD, in consultation with PNGRCS will resolve any outstanding issues with local leaders before deciding on future action.

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