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Information bulletin

Sri Lanka: Severe floods and landslides

 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

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| Glide n° FL-2017-000057-LKA | Date of issue: 27 May 2017 |
| Date of disaster: 26 May 2017 | Point of contact: Neville Nanayakkara, Director General, Sri Lanka Red Cross Society |
| Host National Society: Sri Lanka Red Cross Society | |
| Number of people affected: 230,000 | Number of people to be assisted: TBD |
| Categorization of disaster¹: Yellow (possibility to change to orange) | |

This bulletin is being issued for information only and reflects the current situation and details available at this time. The Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS), with the support of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is assessing the evolving situation for a potential DREF request or Emergency Appeal depending on the evolution of the current rainfalls and its impacts during the next days.

The situation

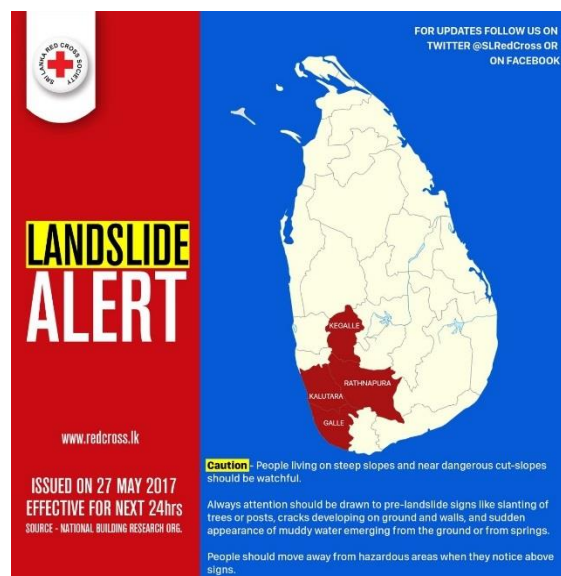
Southwest monsoon weather condition brought heavy rain fall from 25 May 2017 in the southeastern parts of Sri Lanka, killing 100 people according to the Disaster Management Center (latest) report on 27 May 2017 at 2.00pm. DMC confirms that 14 districts are currently affected due the heavy rains and out of these 14, 4 districts namely Galle, Matara, Kalutara and Ratnapura are severely affected from landslides in addition to the floods.

The districts are situated in the southwestern part of the country, also referred to as the “wet belt”, where ample rainfall is common. With heavy rains forecast to continue up to 1st June 2017, it is feared flooding may get worse, and may also affect the condition of other districts where coping mechanisms may be weaker.

Following the heavy rain falls, landslide warnings have also been issued to Kalutara, Ratnapura, Galle and Kegalle districts by the National Building Research Organization (NBRO). In addition, the government has urged people who in Colombo and Gampaha districts, especially those on river banks, to be on alert for possible flash floods.

People who live close to the shores are also advised to refrain from fishing and other naval activities by the Meteorology Department as the sea around the island could be very rough due to the activation of the Southwest monsoon weather condition. The Meteorological Department has also urged people to be vigilant of thunderstorms and lightning.

The DMC has issued warnings to the people who live by the Gin, Kalu, Nilwala and Kelani River banks and lowlands to be on alert for flash floods. At a media briefing on 26 May 2017, the Government of Sri Lanka confirmed that the Tri Forces have been deployed for emergency relief activities and evacuations. Further, during the media



Warning message circulated on social media by SLRCS about landslides in the four most affected districts, (Photo: SLRCS)

¹ Based on the IFRC Secretariat's Operational Response Framework. This categorization implies that the response intervention is within the capacity of the National Society of an affected country to manage with resources available in-country. If requested, the IFRC Country Office may provide any necessary technical or management support to the National Society, and if required, the IFRC Regional Office may support the mobilization of regional disaster response tools, with Geneva supporting the allocation of Disaster Relief Emergency Funds (DREF).

briefing, the Minister of Home Affairs confirmed that the Divisional Secretariats & District Secretariats in flood affected areas have been turned into Emergency Operations Centres. As per their briefing, evacuation operations are also in place from since 26 May 2027 in coordination with Sri Lanka Police and with other government institutions.

The government confirmed that the required funds for evacuations and relief operations have been allocated by the Ministry of Finance.

Both Tangalle – Weeraketiya and Tangalle – Tissa roads have been flooded due to heavy rains on 26 May 2017 evening and two interchanges in Welipenna and Kokmaduwa in the Southern Expressway are also under water and disrupting the transportation. The DMC has confirmed that the Rathnapura Town has been submerged due to spilling of Kalu River around 11.40am. A forecast report by the Meteorological Department stated that the heavy rains and thunderstorms could be expected in the next 24 hours with high winds up to 80 km per hour.

The details of affected districts are given in the table below:

| No of Districts Affected | Affected persons | Deaths | Injured people | Missing | No of Safe locations (temporary shelter) | People displaced in shelter |
|--------------------------|------------------|--------|----------------|---------|--|-----------------------------|
| 14 | 230,000 | 100 | 34 | 91 | 119 | 27,000 |

Current situation update. Source: DMC – as at 2.00pm on 27 May 2017.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action



Ferry boats from previous SLRCS project used to evacuate people. (Photo: SLRCS)

The Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS) has been issuing weather warnings to the general public and put it branches on high alert from the outset. Social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook as well as the SLRCS website have been used actively to convey messages to the public and report on response actions since 25 May 2017.

The SLRCS volunteers and first responders have been providing the necessary support to the affected people in coordination with Government Authorities.

Branch Disaster Response Teams in Rathnapura, Kalutara, Matara, Galle and Colombo have been deployed to assist people who are stranded by flood waters and to provide essential relief.

In one of the worst affected districts, the SLRCS Rathnapura Branch deployed its disaster response teams to Elapatha and Kalawana areas. Assessments are currently underway in Rathnapura in order to provide the needed relief and care. Over 4,289 people are displaced and are housed at 38 temporary camps.

The Colombo Branch responded to first aid requests and distributed relief items to people stranded in Jayawirugoda in Hanwella. Over 250 families were provided with NFRI items and safe drinking water. First Aid was also administered to people who were affected by floods in the area.

The Kalutara Branch has been providing ferry services to people stranded in Walalavita area. The branch is coordinating closely with local authorities and will provide the necessary care and assistance in the coming days as well. In Kalutara over 12,000 people were affected while 38 people lost their lives from a landslide in the area, with many people still missing.

The Galle branch launched a boat service to rescue people stranded in the area. In Galle alone around 30,638 people were affected from flash floods.

The Matara Branch responded to a request to provide food items to several families stranded in Malimbada and Thihagoda area.

Branch volunteers continue to assess the situation and are sharing information with national headquarters on needs and damages, and on relief activities realized so far. The national headquarters has dispatched some non-food relief items from its stock to branches and is coordinating a plan of action for immediate response. Some local funds have also been released to Galle Branch to cover administrative costs and a spare vehicle has been deployed to support Ratnapura Branch. Besides the relief distributions the branches are mainly active in water rescue boats, evacuating those stranded to safer locations.

The IFRC country team is in constant communication with SLRCS and has made available initial funding from to kick start immediate support. An emergency plan of action is under preparation and an allocation from its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund is under consideration. Further technical support is provided from IFRC offices in New Delhi and Kuala Lumpur.



Sri Lanka Red Cross volunteer distributing drinking water to a local resident affected by the floods. (*Photo: Sri Lanka Red Cross Society*)

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The IFRC's work is guided by Strategy 2020 which puts forward three strategic aims:



Save lives,
protect livelihoods,
and strengthen recovery
from disaster and crises.



Enable **healthy**
and **safe**
living.



Promote **social inclusion**
and a culture of
non-violence and **peace.**
