

# ***INDIA : FLOODS***

**appeal no: 19/2000**  
***11 August 2000***

***THIS PRELIMINARY REQUEST  
FOR ASSISTANCE SEEKS  
CHF 6,000,000 IN CASH  
TO ASSIST 200,000 BENEFICIARIES FOR 3 MONTHS***

## ***Summary***

In recent weeks, five States across north and north eastern India have experienced extensive flooding caused by the seasonal monsoon rains. The heavy rains have caused widespread displacement of the population, affecting between 4 -5 million people in the States of Assam, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal and Arunachal Pradesh. Major damage was registered on local infrastructure while communications with some areas have been severed leaving thousands of villages marooned with no access to relief supplies or medical assistance. Where possible, the Indian Red Cross Society (IRC) has responded to the crisis and has been working closely with the local authorities to provide urgently needed relief assistance to flood victims who have been rendered homeless. The International Federation Regional Delegation in India has already undertaken a rapid needs assessment in Assam and a Field Assessment and Coordination Team (FACT) of technical delegates is en route to India to carry out further in-depth assessments of all the flood stricken States.

## ***The Disaster***

The south western monsoon arrived early in north east India and reports of flooding in the State of Assam started coming in by late June. The situation worsened dramatically at the beginning of August when flash floods resulting from heavy rains in the Himalayas swept south, causing breaches in the embankments along many parts of the Brahmaputra river and its tributaries, inundating surrounding areas. The combined death toll from the floods in the north east has risen to over 300 people with many more people remaining unaccounted for. The worst of the flooding has occurred in Assam where 10% of the State is reportedly underwater and over 1.5 million people have been forced to flee their homes. The northern districts of West Bengal and Bihar have been equally affected and flash floods have wreaked havoc in parts of Himachal Pradesh. The armed forces are active in some States and are engaged in evacuating people to safety by boat and helicopter. Whilst some of the population have been relocated to temporary shelters, the less fortunate ones remain encamped on areas of high ground such as embankments and roads, largely dependent on sporadic relief assistance delivered by the armed forces

mobilised to assist the local authorities in their relief efforts. The economic impact of the floods cannot be fully assessed at this stage, but damage to property and the loss of livestock and cropland is extensive. Heavy rains in the region have persisted and river levels are continuing to run above danger levels in many areas. The monsoon is not expected to abate until mid-September and there are fears that further flooding can be expected in the coming weeks. Due to the inaccessibility of many areas which remain under water, detailed information on the extent of the disaster in each State have yet to come in and the true scale of the humanitarian and economic impact is still to be evaluated.

### **Assam**

Since the end of June, Assam has endured three successive waves of flooding although flash floods between the 4 and 6 August caused the most extensive damage, rendering 3.1 million people homeless or marooned. Over 3,400 villages across 16 districts have been affected and over 200,000 hectares of cropland has been damaged. The power lines in some areas have been washed away and many sections of road and rail communications are underwater or have been severed completely. All the rivers running through Assam are currently running 1 metre above the danger level at many places. Major embankments have been breached at 54 points which has caused the worst of the flooding. The island of Mazuli has been completely engulfed, forcing the population of 100,000 people to flee. With recent rains, the water levels in the lower stretches of the Brahmaputra river have continued to rise engulfing fresh areas in the districts of Darang, Dhubri, Lakhimpur, Jorhat, Morigaon, Barpeta and Goalpara .

Thousands of people have sought safety on higher ground and are encamped on roads and embankments. Due to the continued water-logging of many areas, incidences of waterborne diseases such as malaria and gastroenteritis are reported to be on the increase. With little access to clean water or relief supplies, there are fears that fatalities could grow amongst the displaced population unless the flood waters rapidly subside.

### **Bihar**

According to government estimates, 1.6 million people in 1,042 villages are affected across 17 districts in northern Bihar. The flood affected districts are Champaran, West and East Champaran, Begusarai, Darbhanga, Saharsa, Sitamarhi, Araria, Muzaffarpur, Purnea, Supaul, Madhubani, Samastipur, Sahebganj, Madhepura, Saran, Vaishali, Seohar and Gopalganj. The total flood affected area covers 121,000 hectares. Several major rivers including the Ganga, Kamla balan, Bhutahi balan, Kosi and Bagmati are flowing above danger levels at several places. Over 4,000 houses have been destroyed as well as road and rail links into some areas. Over 1 million people have been displaced from their homes and the local authorities and armed forces continue to rescue villagers who have been cut off by the flood waters.

### **Himachal Pradesh**

Flash floods caused by heavy rains in Tibet, struck Himachal Pradesh in the early hours of July 31. River levels rose dramatically, destroying 17 major bridges and 51 foot bridges along the Sutlej valley while at least 50-kms of roads have been wiped out by the river at various places. Three districts close to the border with Tibet were worst hit and the district of Kinnaur remains cut off. The ensuing floods have rendered other parts of the State inaccessible and have caused extensive damage to property. Indian Air Force helicopters have evacuated over 300 people affected by the flash floods and have air- dropped 48 tonnes of relief material.

### **West Bengal**

Extensive flooding has been reported by the Indian Red Cross State branch in 4 northern districts of West Bengal where the floods have affected more than 500,000 people. 21,000 hectares of cropped land have been inundated and 3 tea plantations valued at 60 million rupees (CHF 2.2 million) have been seriously damaged. A hundred metres of railway bridge has been damaged and there has been a breach in the national highway of at least 200 metres. The rivers Torsha, Mansai and Diana are flowing above danger levels at several points and the State authorities fear a confluence of the rivers Raidak and Santosh at Baravisha in Kumargram district. If a change in the course of these rivers occurs, many villages may be swept away.

### **Arunachal Pradesh**

On Sunday, 6 August, seven people died following flash floods caused by heavy rains in the Himalayas. Two major bridges across the River Siang were destroyed severing road communications across much of the State.

## ***The Response So Far***

### **Government Action •**

The State Governments of Assam, Bihar and West Bengal have all responded to the plight of the flood victims and because of the scale of the disaster the armed forces (army and airforce) have been deployed across the affected districts of Assam and Bihar in order to conduct search and rescue operations and carry out airdrops of food and non-food relief to the marooned communities. In Assam, the State Government has sanctioned nearly 22 million rupees (CHF 800,000) to fund the relief effort and local authorities in the affected districts have established 347 'relief camps' in public buildings such as schools and colleges temporarily housing displaced people. One camp can house a maximum of 500 people. Whilst the Government has assumed responsibility for the needs of the displaced population, there are difficulties in ensuring that these sites receive regular provisions of food and clean drinking water. The rescue effort is still underway by the armed forces who are also involved in addressing some of the medical needs of the displaced population. The army has been providing some cooked food in the worst hit areas whilst the airforce continues to airdrop food from helicopters to marooned villages. Electricity and water supply to many affected areas have not been repaired although major road and rail links connecting Assam with Western India have been restored. Local authorities are repairing road and rail links to some of the affected districts but these efforts are being hampered as water levels rise and fall intermittently. In Bihar, Indian airforce helicopters have reportedly air dropped 16 tonnes of foodstuffs, medicines and other non-food items. Army M-70 helicopters have delivered 25 tonnes of chura (beaten rice) in the areas where people have been marooned by the floodwaters. Over a hundred Army personnel members with boats are assisting the local authorities with rescue and relief operations and about 100 divers have been called in to help rescue some of the people who remain stranded. Apart from organising temporary relief camps for the displaced, the authorities in West Bengal are attempting to restore communications across the north of the state where road and rail links have been destroyed by the floods.

### **Red Cross/Red Crescent Action •**

The Indian Red Cross Society already has experience in responding to annual flooding in the affected States and has been actively responding to the current crisis since late June when the first wave of flooding struck the State of Assam. Based on local capacities, relief activities have been carried out by the Red Cross branches at State and district level in all of the affected States. The IRC national headquarters have allocated relief supplies from their emergency stocks which have been despatched by road and rail from regional warehouses in Haryana, Calcutta and Madras. The Red Cross volunteers have been mobilised to work alongside local authorities assisting in relief distributions and helping to evacuate the homeless to relief camps. Where they exist, local Red Cross health facilities have been treating people suffering from waterborne diseases such as malaria and gastroenteritis. The Federation Regional Delegation in India has immediately despatched a relief expert to the State of Assam to carry out a rapid assessment in collaboration with the Indian Red Cross Society while the Federation Secretariat released CHF 100,000 from its Disaster Relief and Emergency Fund (DREF) to support the first days of the operation. A further team of 5 Federation technical experts is expected in Delhi on 13 August and will travel to the affected States in the north and north east of the country by the beginning of next week in order to carry out further in-depth assessments as well as to strengthen the operational capacity of the National Society.

### **Assam**

Despite limited material and financial resources Assam State branch headquarters together with 16 district branches out of a total of 24 have been actively responding to the floods. Volunteers have been mobilised at State and district level to complement relief efforts undertaken by the Government and the armed forces. Thousands of flood victims who have been rendered homeless have been temporarily

housed in public buildings such as schools and colleges and Red Cross volunteers are supporting this process by helping to provide food, cooking utensils, clean water, clothes, bedding and other commodities. Relief activities are being carried out on an ad hoc basis, with distributions targeted at the most vulnerable.

When the flooding began in late June, the Assam State branch rapidly distributed the existing emergency stocks of food and non-food relief items from its warehouse in the State capital in Guwahati. Additional supplies were requested from the Indian Red Cross Society headquarters in Delhi and a consignment of supplies comprised of non-food relief items including cloth sheeting, assorted clothing, cooking utensils and shelter materials was despatched by rail from the Indian Red Cross regional warehouse in Calcutta. In addition, the Federation Regional Delegation in India released CHF 10,000 for the procurement of relief supplies locally in Assam. Some of these funds have been spent on transportation costs and local procurement of, at this point, already distributed mosquito nets and tarpaulins.

Logistical difficulties have considerably hampered the relief activities. The Red Cross teams have been unable to reach thousands of people who remain marooned in their villages or on embankments. Access to many of the worst affected villages has been impossible as many roads remain impassable and some areas of the State remain heavily water-logged despite reports that the floodwaters are receding. Consequently, until the floodwaters recede throughout the State, most of the Red Cross relief activities will remain confined to the vicinity of Guwahati district.

#### **Bihar**

The Bihar State Red Cross has been monitoring the level of flooding across the State since late June. During the seasonal monsoon, 26 out of Bihar's 55 districts are prone to flooding. Currently, 16 districts in the north are affected and the Indian State Branch headquarters in Patna have been providing limited relief supplies to district branches. Following a request for assistance to the Indian Red Cross headquarters, consignments of non-food relief items have been despatched in July by rail to Patna from the Indian Red Cross regional warehouses in Calcutta, Haryana and Madras. These items were largely comprised of cloth sheeting (for making clothing), cooking utensils, bedding and shelter material including tarpaulins and tents. A further request for assistance has since been made to the national headquarters. Volunteers from district branches have been working closely with the local authorities to provide relief assistance to displaced people sheltered in public buildings. They have also been active in raising funds and supplies for the relief effort at a local level.

#### **Arunachal Pradesh**

Due to the relatively sparse population residing predominantly in the hills, flooding in Arunachal Pradesh has not had widespread humanitarian consequences. The Indian Red Cross Society intervention has been nominal and has largely comprised of assistance at branch level where volunteers have been raising support from local communities to assist some 2,500 displaced people who have been accommodated in temporary shelters by the local authorities.

#### **West Bengal**

The West Bengal State branch of the Indian Red Cross Society has requested food and non-food assistance from the IRC headquarters in anticipation of the flooding. A needs assessment is currently underway in the northern districts.

#### **Himachal Pradesh**

Three district branches of the Himachal Pradesh Red Cross State branch are supporting the State Government relief effort in the flood affected areas with relief distributions and temporary accommodation for people who have been rendered homeless by the floods. A consignment of non-food relief items was despatched from the IRC regional warehouse in Haryana to the State capital of Shimla. These supplies have already been distributed as part of the Government relief effort along with other items purchased locally. Further requests for assistance from the IRC headquarters are dependent on a local needs assessment which is currently underway.

#### **Other Agencies' Action •**

Some local NGOs, political parties and religious organisations are present in the affected States and are assisting the Government relief effort where possible. Some international NGOs may be working through

local partners in the region but so far there have been little evidence of any international organisations active on the ground. The Lutheran World Service (India) are reportedly carrying out a needs assessment in Assam. WFP with an on-going programme in Assam has been requested by the Assam State Government to provide additional assistance.

#### **Co-ordination •**

Responsibility for co-ordination of the relief effort at a national level rests with the Ministry of Agriculture whilst the co-ordination of relief efforts at the state level is the responsibility of the Chief Minister of the relevant States with specific functions assigned to the Flood Control Minister and the State Relief Commissioner. Respective Government offices are liaising with their counterparts in the armed forces who are effectively spearheading the majority of relief activities. The Indian Red Cross Society supported by the Federation is co-ordinating all current activities and intended operations with the Government armed forces and other humanitarian actors.

## ***The Intended Operation***

#### **Assessment of Needs •**

Initial assessments by the Indian Red Cross Society and the Federation indicate that the immediate priority is to increase the volume of basic food and non-food relief materials currently being distributed to the flood victims particularly in Assam which is the worst affected State. Despite their efforts, Government relief has been sporadic and has failed to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. Thousands of people remain encamped on embankments or in relief camps with little or no access to relief supplies. Having lost all their material possessions and with no food reserves, their situation becomes increasingly precarious by each day. A major fear is the increase in water borne diseases as people in the flood affected areas have no access to clean drinking water.

#### **Immediate Needs •**

As the rains continue and increasing numbers of people are affected by the floods, there is an urgent need for increased, sustained and more widespread distributions of basic food commodities. Non-food relief items are also needed, including water purification tablets, mosquito nets, tarpaulins, blankets, clothing and cooking utensils, all of which are necessary to sustain the most vulnerable population who have lost their homes and material possessions. As there have been substantial crop losses and many people were unable to save their existing food reserves, thousands of people are now dependent on external assistance. Relief support from the Red Cross is aimed at increasing the individual and communities ability to cope with this disaster. Urgent repairs to infrastructure such as road and rail links need to be carried out by the local State authorities to enable the transportation of relief supplies to the worst affected areas.

#### **Red Cross Objectives •**

The Indian Red Cross Society, together with the International Federation will carry out a relief operation that provides emergency relief assistance targeted at the most vulnerable people amongst the flood affected population. This operation intends to initially assist 200,000 people for a period of upto 90 days with some 8,000 MT of basic emergency relief supplies.

This relief assistance will be complimentary to efforts made by other organisations that are providing assistance. The emergency operation will be monitored and evaluated to assess the need for any further required assistance.

## ***National Society/Federation Plan of Action***

#### **Emergency Phase •**

The Indian Red Cross Society, supported by the International Federation, proposes to carry out a three month emergency relief operation initially targeting 200,000 of the most vulnerable people across the worst affected States of Assam, Bihar, West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh. The target group of beneficiaries broadly comprises people whose homes and material possessions have been damaged or destroyed by the floods and have no resources to sustain them in the coming months. Where possible, food and non-food rations will be procured locally at the State level and transported to district branches for local distribution amongst the displaced population and those people who may have been able to return to rebuild their homes. Supply lines from the Indian Red Cross regional warehouses will also be maintained and increased. Relief distributions will be carried out in co-ordination with the local authorities to ensure that the Red Cross relief efforts are complimentary with those of other organisations. Financial and technical assistance in the form of experienced relief delegates will be provided by the Federation to reinforce the capacity of the Indian Red Cross at national and State levels. The IRC will assign a floods co-ordinator at national headquarters who will assume responsibility for branch liaison and distribution of relief materials from national to State level.

The Indian Red Cross Society supported by the Federation assessment team will in the coming days assess more in detail the basic needs of the targeted beneficiaries as well as define the operational modalities of the Red Cross action. A comprehensive plan of action and detailed budget will be worked out by the Indian Red Cross Society and the assessment team.

#### **Capacity of the National Society •**

Although the affected State branches of the Indian Red Cross Society have plenty of experience in responding to disasters and despite having hundreds of committed volunteers at local level and excellent relations with the local authorities, they have limited capacity both at national and State level to carry out a relief operation of this scale. Additional support from the International Federation is required to implement the proposed plan of action. The Indian Red Cross Society will manage the overall operation with support of the International Federation. A three person team of technical delegates will be composed to support the operation.

#### **Present Capacity of the Federation in India •**

The Federation Regional Delegation in India has a small team of delegates specialised in health, finance, institutional development and information. Current capacity and programme commitments throughout the region mean that support to the floods relief operation will be limited to financial processing, administration and information support.

## ***Budget summary***

See Annex 1 for details. This Annex, however, represents a preliminary budget which will be revised once the Field Assessment and Coordination Team finalizes their assessment mission.

## ***Conclusion***

As the monsoon continues, further heavy downpours of rain are forecast and the numbers of people who are affected in north eastern India can be expected to rise. The floods have already led to the displacement of between 4-5 million people and the local authorities and armed forces are struggling to cover the basic food and medical needs of the most vulnerable population many of whom have received no assistance so far. The monsoon is set to continue well into September and there is an urgent need to secure financial support in order to launch the emergency phase of this operation without further delay.

Jean Ayoub  
Acting USG - DROC a.i.

Didier J. Cherpitel  
Secretary General

ANNEX 1

## **BUDGET SUMMARY**

APPEAL No.  
19/2000

### **India Floods**

TYPE	VALUE
<b>RELIEF NEEDS</b>	<b>IN CHF</b>
Food items: 7,200 mts	3'400'000
Health, sanitation, water	250'000
Non food items	900'000
<b>TOTAL RELIEF NEEDS</b>	<b>4'550'000</b>

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### **CAPITAL EQUIPMENT**

Vehicles: 3 field vehicles	60'000
Computers, telecom. equipment	40'000
Office furniture & equipment	10'000

### **PROGRAMME SUPPORT**

Programme management	404'580
Technical support	121'110
Professional services	134'310

<b><u>TRANSPORT STORAGE &amp; VEHICLE COSTS</u></b>	<b>220'000</b>
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### **PERSONNEL**

Expatriate staff	200'000
National staff	120'000
Personnel (support costs)	40'000

**ADMINISTRATIVE & GENERAL SERVICES**

Travel & related expenses	10'000
Information expenses	10'000
Administrative & general expenses, assessments/evaluations	80'000

**TOTAL OPERATIONAL NEEDS** 1'450'000

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**TOTAL APPEAL CASH, KIND, SERVICES** 6'000'000

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**LESS AVAILABLE RESOURCES (-)**

**NET REQUEST** 6'000'000

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