

CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: FLOODS

**appeal no: 12/97
14 July 1997**

***THIS APPEAL SEEKS CHF 6.960.000
IN CASH, KIND AND SERVICES
TO ASSIST 257,000 BENEFICIARIES FOR 1 MONTH***

Summary

In the worst flooding to hit the Central and Eastern Europe this century, damage and destruction to buildings, roads, agricultural land, communications and infrastructure continues to increase, affecting over one million people. Freak weather conditions -- heavy rains, hailstorms and high winds -- have led to serious flooding, population evacuation and widespread material damage. Amongst the worst hit areas are Southwest Poland, the Czech Republic, northern Slovakia and Northeast Hungary. In Poland alone damage estimates have been put at more than USD 1 billion.

The Disaster

In Poland 17 provinces, with a combined population of more than 20 million, have been affected by the floods. With 180 towns under water and another 140 partially flooded, more than 20,000 people had been evacuated from the worst hit areas by 11 July and 33 deaths were reported. The flooding is continuing along Poland's two main rivers, the Odra and Wisla. Over the weekend of 12-13 July flooding reached Wroclaw, a major town with a population of 600,000, resulting in the evacuation of over 40,000 people. Drinking water supplies, electricity, gas and telephone lines have been cut in the affected areas. A total of 400,000 hectares of land are under water and 1,050 km of roads and 159 bridges damaged. The situation is likely to worsen as retention reservoirs break capacity levels and overflow into nearby districts.

A total of 32 districts, covering approximately 40% of the territory of the Czech Republic have been affected by the same disaster. Over 40 deaths have been reported, more than 60,000 people have been moved to safety, and several hundreds of thousands of others have been affected by flood damage. With many roads impassable and gas, electricity and telephone lines cut off, communication is at a standstill. The army has been helping to distribute relief goods in the regions only accessible by air.

In Slovakia, where more than 250,000 people have been affected by the floods and over 17,000 evacuated, broken lines of communication are the major obstacle to relief efforts. In Hungary major damage has been caused by hailstorms and high winds to crops, buildings, telephone and electricity lines in one of the poorest regions of the country. Some 530 houses have been damaged, at a cost of nearly 250,000 CHF, and affecting almost 900 people. Widespread agricultural crop destruction is also a major worry.

The Response so far

Government Action •

Emergency response has been organised by governments and local authorities in all of the affected regions. Where necessary civil defence forces and the army have been helping to distribute aid in areas completely cut off by road, rail and telephone communication lines. In Poland and the Czech Republic emergency operations have been co-ordinated by national committees, with local emergency committees functioning in each province or district. The National Red Cross Societies are represented on these committees.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action •

With their unique branch network, Red Cross Societies have some of the best distribution opportunities in the countries affected. The National Societies have been co-ordinating their relief work with governments, local authorities and NGOs active in the region.

Polish Red Cross

District Committee Secretaries of the Polish Red Cross are directly involved in the flood response action as members of district Anti-Flood Task Force Units. Emergency warehouse stocks of blankets, warm clothing and bedding have been distributed to evacuees accommodated in schools and public buildings but these stocks are now exhausted. Clothes, food and water have been received in response to an appeal to the general public, but as the situation worsens needs are increasing.

Czech Red Cross

The Czech Red Cross has been working through Local Crisis Units to respond to the situation. Staff and volunteers have been involved in the evacuation of citizens from danger areas to provisional shelter and in providing drinking water, food, baby food, hygiene items and clothing to those affected. The National Society is also co-ordinating the collection of public donations and the transportation of the goods to the flooded areas. Distribution is carried out in co-operation with the Local Crisis Units.

Slovak Red Cross

The Slovak Red Cross is continuing to monitor needs in the flooded areas and is assisting civil defence rescue teams involved in the evacuation of flood victims.

Hungarian Red Cross

The National Society has carried out an assessment of needs in the affected areas and has carried out initial preparations for the distribution of urgently-needed relief items.

The Intended Operation

Assessment of Needs •

Those evacuated from flooded areas were unable to take food, clothing and necessary hygiene supplies with them. Now accommodated in provisional shelters in schools and other public buildings, they have no means of cooking, even if water, electricity and gas supplies were reconnected.

Immediate Needs •

Immediate needs include drinking water, tinned food (which can be eaten without cooking), basic hygiene items, warm clothing and bedding.

Anticipated Later Needs •

Although the heavy rains may stop in the near future, flood damage is expected to continue as retention reservoirs overflow. Urgent needs have to be covered until water, electricity and gas supplies are reconnected and homes made habitable. The situation in Slovakia is expected to worsen as flood water flows south and breaks capacities in reservoirs and rivers throughout the country. The International Federation and the National Society are closely monitoring the situation.

Red Cross Objectives •

The Red Cross Societies throughout the region are seeking to cover the most urgent needs of evacuees and those cut off in flooded regions, through the provision of food and hygiene parcels, drinking water, blankets and detergent.

National Society/Federation Plan of Action

Emergency Phase: *One month* •

Polish Red Cross

Basic food and hygiene parcels will be provided to 20,000 families for a period of one month. Blankets, bed sheets and detergents will also be distributed to the same families. Supplies will be purchased locally and transported to Red Cross branches in the five worst-affected provinces. Five Water Purification Teams from Austrian and German Red Cross will provide drinkable water in the most affected areas.

Czech Red Cross

Basic food and hygiene parcels will be provided to 30,000 families for a period of one month. In addition blankets, bed sheets and detergents will also be distributed. Supplies will be purchased locally and transported to Red Cross branches for distribution.

Slovak Red Cross

Drinking water will be provided to cover the needs of 5,000 people for two weeks, and 760 baby food parcels will be distributed to families with children up to the age of six. In addition 100 lifesaving jackets will be distributed to rescue teams involved in the evacuation of citizens.

Hungarian Red Cross

An initial large family food parcel will be provided to 500 families to cover basic needs for one week. A smaller follow-on weekly food parcel and hygiene parcel will be distributed to the same 500 families and an additional 500 families over the following two weeks. A total of 250 blankets will also be distributed to the most vulnerable families.

Capacity of the National Societies •

Polish Red Cross

Local Red Cross offices will be responsible for packaging and distribution of aid, with volunteers helping with local transport and distribution. The operation will be led and monitored by the Social Welfare and Emergency Assistance Department of the Polish Red Cross headquarters in Warsaw. Branch Secretaries will be responsible for local monitoring.

Czech Red Cross

Czech Red Cross headquarters staff in Prague are co-ordinating relief consignments from branches in the areas not affected by the floods. Supplies will be purchased locally and transported for packaging and distribution by volunteers from local Red Cross offices.

Slovak Red Cross

Drinking water and baby food parcels will be distributed by truck in co-operation with civil defence transportation facilities. As communication lines have been particularly affected by recent flooding, the National Society hopes to be able to develop its internal wireless communication capacity, to ensure more immediate and efficient response in case of such disasters.

Hungarian Red Cross

Items for the food and hygiene parcels will be purchased locally. Under the supervision of the Hungarian Red Cross headquarters, local Red Cross branches will be responsible for distribution to beneficiaries.

Evaluation •

The International Federation's Regional Delegation in Budapest will assist the National Societies with reporting and monitoring requirements.

Budget summary

See annex one for details.

Conclusion

The situation is unlikely to improve in the near future. The effects of flood damage will increase before communication and resource lines can be reconnected. Flood water levels continue to rise forcing further evacuations of local populations, with those already accommodated in provisional shelters unable to return to their homes. The National Societies and the International Federation are continuing to monitor and assess local needs. For more information contact Leopoldo Principe, Desk Officer on ++4122 7304319.

Margareta Wahlström
Under Secretary General,
Disaster Response & Operations Coordination

George Weber
Secretary General