

BOLIVIA: FIRES

appeal no: 20/99
20 August 1999

***THIS APPEAL SEEKS CHF 206,000
IN CASH, KIND AND SERVICES
TO ASSIST 2,880 BENEFICIARIES FOR 2 MONTHS***

Summary

Large fires in the Santa Cruz Department of Bolivia have caused widespread destruction to crops and homes. Fires are still burning in some areas. The Bolivian Red Cross plans to assist at least 576 families for 2 months with food, kitchen sets, hygiene articles and bedding. Already the Bolivian Red Cross branch in Santa Cruz is very active but their supplies have been exhausted and they require additional cash to meet the needs of the victims. CHF 100,000 has been released from the Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) to support this operation.

The Disaster

On 14 August 1999, traditional slash-and-burn activities in agricultural areas which were being carried out during a period when exceptionally strong winds of up to 90 kilometres an hour occurred, resulting in large fires fuelled by the winds. The fires began around the town of Ascension de Guarayos located 300 kms north of the city of Santa Cruz and 867 kms from the capital city of La Paz. Altogether 15 provinces in the Department of Santa Cruz have been affected. Three persons are reported dead with an undetermined number injured, and 576 homes have been destroyed leaving more than 2,800 persons homeless. The population consists of poor subsistence farmers who have already been suffering due to drought. Some fires are still burning and slash-and-burn activities apparently have continued. Residents of rural settlements continue to be evacuated. Some 5,700 persons are in 8 temporary shelters consisting of schools and public buildings. Many have been able to save some clothing and mattresses. Food is being provided in communal kitchens. Travel in the area is very difficult and slow. All aircraft are grounded due to the intense smoke. Telephone service continues to function but there is no electricity and clean water sources are affected. A 30-bed hospital is operational with 2 doctors and 10 nurses caring for the burn and smoke related injuries.

The Response so far

Government Action

The Bolivian Government has declared the zone a disaster area, and are providing assistance available in the nearby region. Some local contributions have arrived, and the Government has promised tents for temporary shelters to be set up in the community centers. Clean water is being transported by tanker trucks to the victims, and assistance has been offered in the reconstruction of 600 homes. The fire brigades continue to fight the flames.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Santa Cruz branch of the Bolivian Red Cross immediately sent volunteers to the area to assist with first aid and shelter management, and bring food to the shelters. Together with the Federation, a detailed survey has been carried out. The Red Cross is also appealing locally and co-ordinating the in-kind donations arriving at their warehouse and at the Santa Cruz airport. Press releases have been issued to keep the public up to date on assistance provided.

Other Agencies' Action w

Caritas is present in the zone and is providing clothing and food. The Pan American Health Organisation is carrying out a survey on health and medical needs.

Co-ordination w

The National Emergency Committee (including all the government agencies involved in disaster relief and the Bolivian Red Cross as a full partner) has been meeting regularly.

The Intended Operation

Assessment of Needs w

The Federation presently has a delegate in Bolivia who assisted the Bolivian Red Cross in carrying out the survey and continues to register the victims who need assistance.

Immediate Needs w

Immediate needs as determined by Civil Defence and the Red Cross are for food, clothing, hygiene items, cooking pots and portable stoves, bed clothing, and reconstruction materials.

Anticipated Later Needs w

Reconstruction material will be provided by the Government

Red Cross Objectives w

The Red Cross will procure and distribute food, kitchen utensils and basic hygiene articles.

National Society/Federation Plan of Action

The Bolivian Red Cross, assisted by the Federation, will purchase food, hygiene supplies and cooking sets locally in Santa Cruz, will package all items for distribution with proper identification using local volunteers and volunteers from other branches as needed, and will transport and deliver the relief items to families who have been identified and given ration cards as determined by Red Cross volunteers. Food will be provided in two monthly distributions.

Capacity of the National Society w

The Bolivian Red Cross has 72 professional staff supported by 500 volunteers. The Bolivian Red Cross has considerable experience in such disaster response programmes.

Present Capacity of the Federation in Bolivia w

The Federation delegate will assist with this operation until an additional delegate can be recruited to assist.

Evaluation w

The Director of Disaster Services together with the Santa Cruz branch will make bi-monthly reports and will submit a final report at the end of the operation.

Budget summary

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

Responding to widespread fires in the Santa Cruz area and the resulting damage caused, the Federation will support the Bolivian Red Cross with the procurement and distribution of basic relief items for 576 families, providing immediate support for a two month period.

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