

INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

SRI LANKA: FLOODING & LANDSLIDES

19 May 2003

Information Bulletin N° 2

Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) allocated: 50,000

The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 180 countries.

For more information: www.ifrc.org

In Brief

The Federation will launch an Emergency Appeal in the coming hours based on further updates and details from assessment reports as they are received. A DREF allocation of CHF 50,000 has been released. Unearmarked funds to repay DREF are needed

The Situation

Torrential rains accompanied by heavy winds and landslides in central and coastal Sri Lanka during the past 48 hours have left an estimated 200 dead (local newspapers have quoted government officials saying that they expect the death toll to rise), with 700 missing, and over 129,000 families displaced. Many thousands more are affected and these figures will likely rise in the coming hours. Many of those killed were buried alive in mudslides. The worst affected areas are Ratnapura and parts of the Galle, Matara, Kalutara and Hambantota districts. Some 120,000 people so far have been evacuated to schools and temples, and helicopters are dropping emergency rations in villages that are cut off and cannot be reached. At the time of this report at least 500,000 people have been impacted by the flooding; again this number may rise when the accumulated water reaches lower lying areas. The breakdown of those affected by district so far is:

- Kalutara: 4,000 (families).
- Matara: 25,000.
- Ratnapura: 24,000.
- Galle: 20,000.
- Hambantota: 15,000

Thousands of houses have been damaged, a large number of them totally destroyed. Many buildings have been submerged, particularly in the Ratnapura district where the city's clock tower was reported to be under 15 feet of water. The majority of homeless are also located in Ratnapura district. Forty-seven bodies were recovered from one village after a landslide wiped out the entire village. The villages of Ratnapura, Elapatha, Thotagamuwa, Hangamuwa, Palawela, Dambuluwana, Karangoda, Muwagama, Godigamuwa and parts of Badulla road were inundated. Landslides have been reported from Ratnapura Rest House Road and Godigamuwa and Getangama on the Colombo-Ratnapura Road.

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According to the Ratnapura Divisional Secretary, many thousands of families have been marooned. The landslides are causing difficulties in the relief operation and this has been aggravated due to the high tide conditions prevailing in the sea. These are the heaviest rains to hit the island country since 1947. Flood- waters have destroyed power and communication lines and this in turn, has disrupted road transport and communications and seriously hampered rescue and relief efforts.

The police chief in Ratnapura reported that road links with the capital had been restored and that water was receding from some areas. About a dozen police teams have been dispatched to remote areas to look for survivors. Ratnapura District, famed for its gem mines, is home to one million people. The government is tapping the President's fund for relief. A four-member special Presidential Secretariat Desk has been set up to handle the flood situation. The government has also appointed a four-member Disaster Management Ministerial Committee, allocated 6 million rupees (US\$62,500) for immediate relief and announced it will pay 15,000 rupees (US\$156) for funeral expenses for each of the dead.

The army and the navy have been deployed in support of the government's ongoing relief effort. Naval vessels have also been deployed for rescue and relief operations. Fishing boats are being used as well.

On Monday 19 May the Department of Meteorology warned of new rains. Natural disasters of this magnitude are rare in Sri Lanka, a small tropical island country off India's southern coast with 18.6 million inhabitants. On May 13, a cyclone hit the country and since then it has been raining heavily in the central and southern parts of the country, caused by a tropical depression in the Bay of Bengal.

Action to date (Non-Red Cross)

Both the Prime Minister and the Minister of Social Welfare have visited the affected area and the Ministry of Social Welfare has met the Sri Lanka Red Cross (SLRC) Director General and the Federation Representative for co-ordination purposes. The most urgent need at the moment is for clean water and emergency food rations. The Minister was considering an appeal to the local media to donate through the SLRC.

The police, navy, and army are involved in the rescue and evacuation activities, but have been hampered by the lack of rubber dinghies as other boat types are unfit to negotiate rapid water. The Indian government has reacted by sending a boat with rubber dinghies as well as medicines to the harbour of Galle, due to arrive today (Monday). Inter-agency meetings at district level have been organized for coordination.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The Sri Lanka Red Cross has deployed teams to the affected areas to assess needs and damage. The region's second training for Regional Disaster Response Teams (RDRT) was recently concluded in Sri Lanka and three of the officers from the National Society deployed for the assessment are RDRT trained.

Relief distributions to date

- 25,000 food parcels have been dispatched to the flood affected people as well:
- 10,000 food parcels to Ratnapura
- 4,000 food parcels to Galle
- 4,000 food parcels to Matara
- 2,000 food parcels to Kalutara
- 5,000 food parcels to Hambantota

Distribution of non-food relief is also being sourced from the Red Cross warehouse. The national society has arranged to send convoys daily to the flood affected areas carrying relief items for the affected people. The ICRC provided transport for the relief items and have contributed 3,000 twenty litre water containers. Tomorrow, water will be distributed in Matara and Kalutara. In Hambantota the water bowsers (tankers) procured for the SLRCS drought operation in 2002, are being used to distribute water. A further 10,000 tarpaulins have been made available by ICRC to be dispatched after further assessment.

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The Society has made a public appeal for assistance. Newspapers have carried appeals for contributions to the Red Cross, and many calls are being received from the public in Colombo who wish to support the flood victims. The SLRCS has undertaken a fund raising effort to aid the flood affected population. All other districts have been mobilized to receive local donations. A TV spot during an international cricket match currently underway in Sri Lanka, has been aired to mobilize the public for donations. Four trucks have been sent by SLRCS to collect donations in-kind along the two main roads from Colombo towards the affected area.

Besides these interventions, the Red Cross will also be involved in identifying the most vulnerable beneficiaries for government aid to families of people dead in the latest disaster. The flood-affected areas have many Red Cross volunteers with good skills. In Hambantota, for instance, the volunteers have good experience in assessment and relief from a drought the district witnessed until late last year. The Federation has worked with the branch which has acquired good exposure to emergency relief work. In addition, the Spanish Red Cross has concluded a disaster preparedness programme in eight flood-prone districts including Ratnapura, Kalutara and Galle, aimed at the flood-affected population.

The Federation Team in Delhi and Sri Lanka are coordinating with the Secretariat to launch a Preliminary Appeal today or tomorrow latest. A FACT and RDRT alert is planned to identify additional Disaster Response Team human resources should they be required.

Red Cross and Red Crescent response – the projected operation

The SLRCS, with Federation support, will give immediate priority to first assisting 15,000 of the most vulnerable families (80,000 people approximately) in the emergency phase and for two months post-emergency, providing water and food. Provision is also made for assisting 5,000 worst affected families with non-food items. This figure may be adjusted upwards as the situation evolves.

Immediate needs:

The most important need is for cash to ensure a rapid mobilization in Sri Lanka of the emergency needs such as food, and water. Additional non-food and other supplies such as clothing, shelter, water and health and sanitation essentials will be identified in the coming days as the full assessments are completed.

Coordination

The Head of the Federation's Asia/Pacific Department, Director of DMC and DMC Head of Operations met with the SLRCS President and National Secretary, who are currently in Geneva, to discuss Federation assistance and to approve ongoing activities in support of the national society. DMC and the Asia & Pacific Desk will work jointly on coordination in Geneva during the PNS Meeting this week. On going contacts continue with ECHO and other donors and PNS. The ICRC in Geneva has been contacted and informed of the Federation activities to date.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see www.ifrc.org

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All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.