

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

PAPUA NEW GUINEA: BOUGAINVILLE FLOODS AND HIGH TIDES

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In Brief

This Bulletin (no. 01/2005) is being issued for information only, and reflects the status of the situation and information available at this time. The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

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The Situation

Continuous heavy rainfalls over past few weeks have caused serious flooding across central and south Bougainville province. Strong north east winds also caused high seas that eroded shorelines both on the Atolls and coastal regions, washing away food gardens and sections of plantations. In other areas, food gardens were flooded with sea water, causing crop to rot as the sea subsided.

On the mainland, initial reports indicate that heavy river floods have washed away or flooded villages, schools, bridges, sections of roads and plantations. Considering the overall situation, the president of the autonomous Bougainville government declared a state of emergency in the affected region.



Photo 1: Floods have destroyed homes and food gardens in Siwai district

On 7 August 2005, food gardens in three coastal villages under the Siwai district – Mamagota, Pihanawa and Aitata – were completely uprooted and washed away. Reports from the Siwai district administration claim that floods have carried away and possibly drowned one person. In this district, 519 people living in nine villages were severely affected in the floods. Many domestic animals have been lost, and some concerns remain about potential risk health hazards.

Strong winds and high seas have severely damaged food crops, leaving 2,388 people with little food supply in the Atolls district. In Koiare village under Torokina district, over 150 people are facing food shortages because of damaged food gardens. Most families affected by the high tides and floods have taken shelter in a church building which acts as a temporary care centre, or stay in relative's houses and other dry places, and are struggling to meet basic needs.



Photo 2: Waters flood the main road from Buka to Arawa

Bougainville has formed a task force and is conducting a damage and needs assessment on 22 August 2005. The national disaster centre (NDC) in Port Moresby has been approached for possible assistance and is awaiting further provincial information. Meanwhile, the autonomous region of Bougainville has despatched 1,800 bales of rice to the affected in Atolls district and another 200 bales of rice are being sent to the Torokina district.

In Siwai district, culverts between Miwo river and Boku have been washed away, while wet crossings have been hindered by sand banks that have built up in the floods. Although the district administration has begun clearing causeways of debris, lack of proper equipment has made the progress slow. Local communities have cleared some of the areas on their own initiative to access necessary facilities. Meanwhile, traffic between Siwai and other districts has been completely halted and people are risking lives and vehicles to access certain areas.

A full report of the damage will be compiled after receiving reports from the 12 districts. Further damage reports are due in from Konua and Torukina on the west coast, Buin in south Bougainville, Arawa in central Bougainville, and Tinputz and Atolls in north Bougainville. The autonomous region of

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

A five-member team consisting of the Papua New Guinea Red Cross Society's (PNGRCS) secretary-general, programme coordinator, Federation head of delegation, ICRC cooperation delegate and an Australian Red Cross representative visited the autonomous region of Bougainville from 16-22 August 2005 to assess the possible reactivation of the PNGRCS branch. During their visit, which was already planned before the current emergency, the team took the opportunity to assess the flood situation, and had a series of discussions with the relevant government officials and agencies. The team also met with the President of the recently installed autonomous government of Bougainville, who stressed the need for assistance to the affected population through the provision of relief supplies, especially tarpaulins, cooking utensils and water containers.

The Red Cross working committee in Buka has been in close consultation with headquarters to formulate a plan of action to respond to the disaster. The neighbouring Red Cross branches of New Ireland and East New Britain have been alerted, and they will provide an updated inventory of their buffer stocks for possible reallocation to Bougainville. It is hoped that some supplies, pre-positioned earlier to deal with any mass evacuation in Langila, can be used in Bougainville – subject to authorization from selected donors – now that the Langila volcano eruptions have eased considerably.

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