

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

COLOMBIA: VOLCANIC ACTIVITY & FLOODS

Information Bulletin
no. 01/2006
30 March 2006

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 183 countries.

In Brief

This Bulletin is being issued for information only, and reflects the situation and the information available at this time. The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

The International Federation undertakes activities that are aligned with its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to achieve the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

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All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGO's\) in Disaster Relief](#) and is committed to the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For longer-term programmes in this or other countries or regions, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal. For support to or for further information concerning Federation programmes or operations in this or other countries, or for national society profiles, please also access the Federation's website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

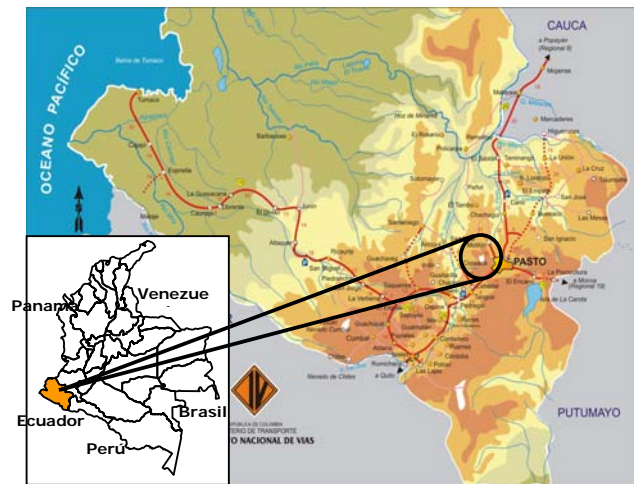
The Situation

Colombia has been affected by both volcanic activity and floods in recent months.

Volcanic Activity

The Colombian Institute of Geology and Mining (Ingeominas) issued a “level two” or “maximum alert” for the Galeras Volcano on 28 March, due to its increased activity. The Galeras Volcano stands 4,270-m high and is located in the department of Nariño in south western Colombia, near the border with Ecuador. Technical follow up in recent days identified gradual and more intensified changes in the volcano’s behaviour, very similar to those observed in 1991 - 1993. A similar situation also occurred last year on 16 November last year (please refer to previous operations for more details http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf_appeals.pl?rpts05/05ME06502.pdf). According to the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DENA), the communities around the volcano considered to be at high risk are Pasto, La Florida and Nariño.

The Colombian government immediately activated its National Operations Committee (COE), of which the Colombian Red Cross Society is a member, mobilized staff from the National Disaster Preparedness and Response System (SNPAD) to the city of Pasto, and activated its contingency plans and emergency systems.



Map showing the location of the Galeras Volcano in the department of Nariño, near the border with Ecuador.
Map courtesy of the Colombian Red Cross Society



Aerial view of the Galeras Volcano
Photo courtesy of Colombian Institute of Geology and Mining archives

Floods

At the same time, the government’s Institute of Water, Meteorology and Environmental Studies (IDEAM) announced that increased rainfall which began during the first week of March is causing serious damages to hundreds of families and has caused 36 deaths. Another 7 people have been reported as missing and 48 have been injured. In total, 39,657 people have been affected (7,285 families).

Accurate information on damaged houses and farmland has not yet been provided; however, 57 landslides, 32 floods, 16 windstorms and 4 avalanches have been reported in 92 municipalities in 16 departments. The most affected departments so far are: Antioquia, Valle del Cauca, Nariño, Cauca, Quindio, Santander, Arauca, Cundinamarca and Boyacá. In addition, IDEAM has announced additional increased rain levels in several areas of the Andean region of the country: the coffee growing region (Eje Cafetero), Santander, Tolima and Antioquia, and in the Pacific region of the country: Chocó, Cauca, Nariño and Valle del Cauca. The population of Valle del Cauca may have to be evacuated if conditions continue to worsen in that area. Many of these areas are still recovering from the rains which hit the country in October and November of last year. According to the Colombian Red Cross Society and the SNPAD, those floods destroyed hundreds of houses and seriously damaged thousands more.

According to the World Meteorological Organization¹, sea-surface temperatures close to the South American coast first became colder than normal beginning in September 2005. This likely influenced local climate patterns during the latter months of 2005, causing increased rain and flooding in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru (please refer to <http://www.ifrc.org/where/appeals/allappeals.asp> for more information on events and relief operations in these countries).

The situation will be closely monitored by the Federation's Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU).

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

Volcanic Activity

The Colombian Red Cross Society (CRCS) has activated its Contingency Plan. The Nariño branch is in constant coordination with local authorities from the Nariño department and the municipalities of Pasto, La Florida and Nariño, as well as with the SNPAD regional and local committees.

The CRCS has activated its first response team, which is composed of 22 health and relief personnel that will be supporting evacuation and shelter operations. The second response team has also been activated and are ready for deployment. This team is composed of 55 members of the Cauca, Valle de Cauca and Risaralda branches who are specialized in health care, search and rescue, temporary shelter and damage assessment. This team will be deployed if the Galeras Volcano's activity changes to "level one," or if the COE takes special measures. A third response team made up of about 230 people from the Cundinamarca, Boyaca, Caldas, Quindio and Tolima branches are on "yellow alert" and ready to be deployed to the area affected within 24 hours, should the need arise. In total, the CRCS has 307 people available to respond to a possible eruption of the Galeras Volcano.

In addition to the above mentioned response teams, the CRCS has 52 National Intervention Team (NITs) members, as well as the CRCS' water and sanitation emergency response team, a telecommunications team to work jointly with the Ministry of Communications, and seven Injury Stabilization and Classification Modules (MEC) that can be deployed to the affected areas if needed. One MEC is already active in the city of Pasto. The logistics network has made available three ambulances, 11 small trucks and one large truck to tackle mobilization needs.

Coordination

The CRCS and the Ecuadorian Red Cross are in constant communication to coordinate actions and exchange information. Support is also being provided by a French Red Cross disaster management delegate in volcanic activity prevention projects. The Netherlands, American and Spanish Red Cross have expressed their intention to support the CRCS with logistics and human resources, should it be required. The CRCS is also in permanent communication with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to coordinate future operations.

Floods

The CRCS is coordinating actions with Regional and Local Operational Committees from the SNPAD, supporting evacuation operations and assisting injured and affected people. Volunteers are in the field to guide the communities in prevention measures that help diminish the effects of floods. Damage assessments are being carried out in the city of Cali to identify the most affected families, as well as support the local government with food and non food distributions. The CRCS emergency response teams are also actively supporting local authorities in their operations in Antioquia, Arauca, Casanare, Chocó, Cundinamarca, los Santanderes and the Eje Cafetero.



In October, 2005 DREF funds were allocated for disaster preparedness activities in anticipation of increased volcanic activity in the area and in response to floods which affected 26 departments at that time.

¹ <http://www.wmo.ch/index-en.html>

So far 115 volunteers, 16 staff, 9 ambulances, 14 vehicles and 1 truck have been activated as part of the humanitarian assistance being carried out by the CRCS. In addition, relief teams in Chocó, Cauca, Valle del Cauca, Nariño, Antioquia, Caldas, Risaralda, Quindío, Tolima; Arauca, Santander, Norte de Santander; Cundinamarca, Boyacá, Casanare and Meta have been placed on “orange alert”, meaning that they are on standby and ready to respond immediately.

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