

# 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. 02/2006  
27 April 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.

#### For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:

- In Colombia: Walter Cotte, National Director of Operations and Relief, Colombian Red Cross Society, Bogotá; email: [walter.cotte@cruzrojacolombiana.org](mailto:walter.cotte@cruzrojacolombiana.org) Phone (571) 437-6300, fax (571) 473-6301
- In Peru: Giorgio Ferrario, Head of Lima Regional Delegation; email [giorgio.ferrario@ifrc.org](mailto:giorgio.ferrario@ifrc.org), phone (511) 221-8151, fax (511) 441-3607
- In Panama: Stephen McAndrew, Coordinator, Federation Pan American Disaster Response Unit, Panama; email [stephen.mcandrew@ifrc.org](mailto:stephen.mcandrew@ifrc.org), phone (507) 316-1001, fax (507) 316-1082
- In Geneva: Olaug Bergseth, Federation Regional Officer, Americas Department, Geneva; email [olaug.bergseth@ifrc.org](mailto:olaug.bergseth@ifrc.org), phone (41 22) 730-4535, fax (41 22) 730-0395

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

### *Volcanic activity*

The Galeras Volcano, which stands 4,270 metres high and is located in the department of Nariño in south western Colombia, near the border with Ecuador, continues threatening about 400,000 people from city of El Pasto, home to nearly half a million people. On 28 March, the Colombian Institute of Geology and Mining (Ingeominas) issued a level II alert, indicating that eruption is possible within days or weeks, and the volcano has increased activity, including frequent tremors, ash explosions and periodical lava expulsions.

According to the latest survey from the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DENA), some 7,935 people are at high risk, although possible danger for additional residents has prompted the government to evacuate a total of 11,392 people. The compulsory evacuation order covers a 15 km (9 mile) radius, including one of the most affluent areas of the city. There has been some reluctance on the part of residents to evacuate as local farmers fear their land and livestock will be taken by others if they leave. People are also suspicious that they will not get their homes back once the emergency has passed.

According to Ingeominas, it could be days or weeks before a change in the volcano's activity is visible. In the meantime, Ingeominas suggests that authorities, members of the National Disaster Preparedness and Response System (SNPAD) and the communities at high risk remain on maximum alert.

According to Ingeominas, these are the three possible scenarios:

1. Volcanic system pressurization with a consequent generation of explosive eruption higher than registered in the years 1992, 1993, 2004 or 2005.
2. Magmatic material rises to the surface, increasing the lava dome volume and generating avalanches which would affect the nearest area to the active cone and the Azufral river basin.
3. The least probable scenario is the culmination of magmatic material with no pressurization system and a reduction of volcanic activity.

It is important to mention that the Ecuadorian cities of Quito and Tulcán are also close to the Galeras Volcano and are considered to be at high risk.

### *Floods*

The 2006 rainy season, which the government's Institute of Water, Meteorology and Environmental Studies (IDEAM) predicts will continue until June, has already caused more than 50 deaths and affected 8,000 people. According to the Colombian Red Cross Society (CRCS) and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, a total of 232 houses have been destroyed and 3,800 have been damaged.



A view of an affected area, where several roads have been blocked as a result of mudslides.

On 17 April, the IDEAM recommended issuing orange and yellow alerts across different regions of the country. IDEAM reports high water levels in several sectors of the Magdalena, Cauca, Saldaña, Negro, Zulia, Pamplonita and Carare rivers, and is warning of the increasing probability of landslides and floods in the following seven departments: Antioquia, Bolívar, Cesar, Norte de Santander, Santander, Tolima, and Valle del Cauca. A risk of floods and landslides is also reported for Cundinamarca, the Eje Cafetero region, Huila, Nariño, and Tolima.

Floods such as these are complex disasters, usually accompanied by mudslides and other events. The profile of the affected people is usually varied. Many of the people affected live in high risk areas that are vulnerable but are reluctant to move because of fears of robbery or because they have no other place to go.

193 events associated with this year's rainy season were reported by the SNPAD between 1 January and 18 April, as follows<sup>1</sup>:

Landslides	83	43%
Floods	82	42%
Avalanches	6	3%
Wind storms	22	11%
<b>Total</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>100%</b>

The worst disaster occurred on 12 April when a mudslide along a stretch of the highway connecting Cali and Buenaventura, on the Pacific Coast, swept through the villages of Bendiciones and El 40, killing 33 people and destroying 61 houses. To date, 19 people have been found alive in Bendiciones. Eight people are still missing. Some 300 people were evacuated by military helicopter to Buenaventura, where temporary shelters were set up to accommodate the homeless. The CRCS estimates that 1,000 to 1,200 people lived in the disaster area and that some 700 were left homeless and that a total of 190 families were affected. Days after the tragedy, dozens of Colombian Red Cross Society volunteers remain working in the area, carrying out rescue and recovery of bodies, providing first aid and caring for survivors in temporary shelters. According to official figures provided by the Colombian Red Cross Society, this was the sixth mudslide of the year and there is a high risk that ensuing rains may cause additional emergency situations.

## Red Cross action

### *Volcanic Activity*

The Colombian Red Cross Society continues to support people living in temporary shelters and to prepare residents for the possibility that the situation may worsen. Within the framework of the National Disaster Fund, the CRCS and the Colombian government signed an agreement guaranteeing the management of temporary shelters and allowances for each family that leaves the affected area voluntarily. USD 1.2 million has been made available to compensate the families and guarantee them food and essential services as Red Cross volunteers provide vital health care information. To date, 2,059 people are living in the four shelters managed by the CRCS. Another 3,000 have received an allowance (approximately USD 220 for each four-member family) to support their evacuation. However, some 3,000 people from the most at-risk areas have not followed the official request to leave their homes.



Children receiving psychosocial support through games and leisure activities to help alleviate stress.

Response work is focused on damage and needs assessments, water and sanitation, basic health care, first aid and emergency assistance for about 500 people. Psychosocial support through games and leisure activities for children is another important activity which is helping to alleviate psychological problems in the community. Hundreds of

<sup>1</sup> Information based on OCHA report at <http://www.reliefweb.int/>

additional volunteers are ready to be deployed. Specialized emergency and telecommunications units are also on standby to join the response team immediately, if required.

The CRCS is also working on preparedness and training for the communities so that they are able to react to an eruption without exposing themselves to vulnerable situations. This work is being supported by USD 800,000 with European Commission Disaster Preparedness (DIPECHO) funding and financial support from the national government.

The Ecuadorian Red Cross and the Federation's Pan American Disaster Response Unit have also stated that response units are ready to be mobilized to Colombia within 72 hours. A contingency plan has been prepared jointly by the Ecuadorian and Colombian Red Cross Societies and includes support through medical and rescue equipment along with deployment of National Intervention Team (NIT) members.

**Floods**

The Colombian Red Cross Society has launched a national appeal to support 5,000 families affected by floods, mudslides and high winds during the rainy season and seeks USD 758,000 in cash, goods or services. The CRCS has opened a bank account for collecting donations and published a set of guidelines on the goods that are needed and how they can be donated. Resources received are being directed towards water and sanitation activities, medical services, community-based information campaigns and logistical support. In addition, in coordination with Conexión Colombia (a programme for channelling international donations to Colombia), a joint strategy will be launched to mobilize resources to assist those affected by the rainy season in Valle del Cauca.

In response to the floods, hundreds of CRCS volunteers have given first aid to the injured, organized food distributions, raised awareness of risk reduction, and developed search and rescue activities. Within the SNPAD, the CRCS has also mobilized injured people to health care centres. At the same time, relief groups are monitoring river levels and delivering humanitarian aid provided by the local authorities. All this work is being done in coordination with local and regional disaster preparedness and response committees. In Antioquia, Caldas, Risaralda, Quindio and Tolima, volunteers trained in disaster preparedness have been sent to the most vulnerable communities to share key messages and guidelines on prevention issues. Volunteers have also been supporting a needs assessment of 1,000 people affected in the city of Valle del Cauca. In Buenaventura, almost 200 CRCS volunteers have supported people affected by the deadly mudslide, while 163 families from Arauquita received cooking equipment and mats last week. In Quindio, families threatened by floods have been evacuated and people living in Facatativa have also been assisted.



People affected by floods being evacuated by Red Cross volunteers.

The CRCS continues taking part in the activities of the SNPAD in all affected departments, undertaking search and rescue work, assessments of damage and needs, preliminary population counts, emergency medical care, transfers of the injured to health centres, monitoring of water levels, distribution of emergency assistance made available by the local authorities, support in temporary shelters, classification of private donations and support in telecommunications. The CRCS is also working with local authorities to undertake prevention measures and assist

people living in temporary shelters. In other regions such as Chocó, Cauca, Valle del Cauca and Nariño, relief groups in local Red Cross branches are preparing to respond to new emergencies following an orange alert issued by the authorities in advance of more rain and flooding.

Although rainfall this year has not reached the levels recorded in 2005, official figures show a significant increase in the number of mudslides. However, this has been balanced by a visible decrease in the number of people affected—a fact that likely reflects well coordinated work undertaken by the SNPAD, local authorities and humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross.

**Needs**

The primary immediate needs are for the temporary or permanent relocation of affected families and additional humanitarian assistance, such as food, as there is currently a scarcity of food items which may pose a threat to public health.

**Coordination**

To complement its work in disaster preparedness and response, the CRCS has begun negotiations with the UN System, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), OXFAM, World Vision and the Humanitarian Aid Department of the European Commission. The joint work undertaken with these organizations will support the pre-positioning of humanitarian aid in order to support affected people throughout the rainy season.

[Click here to return to the title page or contact information.](#)