

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

TIMOR-LESTE: STRONG WINDS & FLASH FLOODS

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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 (no. 01/2006) is being issued based on the information available at this time. The Federation is not seeking funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

For further information please contact:

- In Timor-Leste, Cruz Vermelha de Timor-Leste, Secretary-general Ms Isabel Guterres, Phone: +670 724 8963, E-mail: sec-gen@cvtl.tp,
- In Timor-Leste, Federation Head of Country Delegation Olav Ofstad, Phone: +670 7231434, E-mail: olav.ofstad@ifrc.org
- Mr Bekele Geleta, Federation Head of Regional Delegation, Bangkok, Phone: +66 2661 8201 ext 100, Email: bekele.geleta@ifrc.org
- In Geneva: South-East Asia Regional Officer, Charles Evans, Asia Pacific Department, Geneva, Email: charles.evans@ifrc.org; phone +41 22 730 4320; fax 41 22 733 0395

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The Situation

Tropical cyclone "Daryl" spawned a stormy weather off the western coast of Australia during the second week of January. The cyclonic winds from this disturbance descended upon the island of Timor-Leste for four days and destroyed more than 500 houses and corn and rice crops in at least four districts (Ainaro, Bobnaro, Baucau & Viqueque).

The disturbance also stopped the only transport (a sea ferry) link between the capital Dili and the enclave of Oecussi. The enclave, which was already suffering from a shortage of food, quickly started to run short of basic supplies. The situation in the district became worse on 31 January when it rained for eleven hours. The Tono River broke its bank and inundated the surrounding villages. The flooding destroyed the standing maize & rice crop and houses. People living in the area claimed it was the worst flooding since 1972.

In addition to the material damage caused by the destructive winds – roofs blown away, houses turned over and infrastructure such as power lines knocked down – in the four districts, the overriding concern is the destruction of the standing crop. The country faces a chronic food shortage every year in the rural areas. This becomes

particularly acute between the November to February period. The damage to the standing maize & rice crop is set to prolong this acute period to the next harvest cycle in June-July.

In Oecussi, the flooding has caused damage to about 60 wells. There is an immediate need to clean these wells and restore drinking water sources. The farmers have no corn and rice seeds for the next planting season. A big proportion of the cash crop (such as coffee beans) has also been damaged, further reducing alternative income sources in the some communities. The damage to livestock, though limited, has been reported from all the affected districts. The local branch of Cruz Vermelha de Timor-Leste (CVTL) has requested the national headquarters to supply mosquito nets for affected families.

The loss of shelter is a big concern in all the affected area. The extent of damage to houses varies. Initial assessment suggests that about 600 families will need prompt support to restore their basic semi-permanent houses. In some of the districts, such as Ainaro, damage to houses from strong wind is chronic. Technical support to improve the construction design of the houses is needed.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

On 18 January the Cruz Vermelha de Timor-Leste (CVTL) disaster management coordinator was informed that the Ainaro district town was lashed by a windstorm. Initial reports to the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) were shared with the society. They indicated extensive damage to the houses in two communities as well as a few public buildings, including the Ainaro Red Cross branch building.

After consultation with NDMO on 20 January, CVTL dispatched a disaster management team to Ainaro district to assess the damage. The team from national headquarters was supplemented by ten volunteers from the branch. The assessment indicates that there are at least ten upland and lowland villages affected. In total, about 200 families (i.e. 1,400 people, seven per family) were affected in the district.

Since then, three more branches have reported similar damage. The disaster management coordinator has visited two for a quick field assessment. Data from these assessments is being tabulated but initial indications show that in total at least 500 household (3,500 people) are affected.

In Oecussi, the local branch was unable to communicate to the national headquarters its assessment report until 8 February. However, eight volunteers participated in the local assessment coordinated by the district administration. A water and sanitation technician and Oecussi branch development coordinator arrived in the district to support the local branch from today.

The society is coordinating its response operation so far with the country's National Disaster Management Office and relevant government ministry. Information sharing and a coordination meeting have been held at the national and district level with the respective district administration.

The Government so far has responded with support in Oecussi and Ainaro districts. In Ainaro it provided shelter material and in Oecussi food, family kits, and plastic sheeting.

In addition the United Nations Office in Timor-Leste (UNOTIL), World Food Programme (WFP), OXFAM and CARITAS are providing support in Oecussi. WFP has provided food to the Government, while UNOTIL is providing logistical support. OXFAM is helping the department of sanitation with the cleaning of wells and CARITAS is helping local authorities with assessment.

The Federation country delegation, in consultation with CVTL, is in the process of planning an appropriate operation. Based on the current information it seems likely that such an operation would revolve around shelter, food and livelihood issues. The society has expressed a need for external support from the Federation so as to not burden its ongoing disaster management activities. It is expected that the operation will last 3-4 months.

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