

# DREF Bulletin Update



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

## PARAGUAY: DENGUE OUTBREAK

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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 185 countries.*

### In Brief

**Period covered by this update: 29 January – 23 March 2007**

**History of this Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF)-funded operation:**

- CHF 68,000 (USD 54,530 or EUR 42,060) was allocated from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) to respond to the needs in this operation. Unearmarked funds to repay DREF are encouraged.
- This operation is expected to be implemented over a 3 month period, and will be completed by 29 April 2007; a Final Report will be made available three months after the end of the operation (by 29 July 2007).

This operation is aligned with the International Federation's Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet 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>

## Background and current situation

Paraguay's epidemiological emergency originated by the presence of the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito (which carries the virus responsible for dengue fever), has escalated rapidly since the beginning of January 2007. By the end of December 2006, 366 cases of classic dengue fever were reported in the country. As of 9 March 2007, the Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare (MoH) has recorded a total of 17,725 cases of classic dengue. From these figures, there are 46 cases of the hemorrhagic strain of the virus confirmed by laboratory. Four people have died from dengue hemorrhagic fever and five have died from the visceral type of classic dengue. A further two deaths due to dengue have been recorded but with serotype unknown. National officials note that the risk of the spread of the hemorrhagic strain of the virus continues to be considerable.

Official figures indicate that the disease continues to spread at an alarming rate. At the start of February, there were 332 new cases reported per day, however by 20 February, cases had risen to 654 per day. Health workers, however, state that official figures fall short of reality, and argue that an estimated 80 percent of actual cases have not been registered by the MoH. Unofficial figures therefore could be much higher than indicated. Consultations with physicians and communities appear to support the evidence that many continue to self-medicate for symptoms of the disease and are therefore not included in official figures.

The classic strain of the virus is now located in all of the country's departments, with patients having been infected either locally or in regions other than their own. Asunción and now the six cities of the Central Department, register the highest number of confirmed cases, with 90 percent of all cases reported nation-wide. The Cordillera Department is the second most vulnerable area, whilst the Chaco - with a dry climate - is the least vulnerable. On a regional level, the disease is also present in neighbouring countries including Argentina with 126 cases confirmed, Santa Cruz - Bolivia - with 577 cases and Mato Grosso do Sul in Brazil with 42,000 cases confirmed.

The MoH of Paraguay, through Resolution S.G. no. 26, declared a nation-wide epidemiological alert on 12 January 2007, and through Resolution S.G. no. 39, created the Inter-institutional Technical Commission for the Fight Against Dengue. The focus of the national response targets the elimination of the larvae of the mosquito vector, and has included fumigation with insecticide and the collection of waste items which are prime locations for the proliferation of larvae, in Asunción and the Central Department.

Following the rapid growth of the epidemic, on 27 February 2007 the Government declared a state of national emergency through Law 3159, outlining a 60-day national campaign throughout the country to combat the epidemic. The national campaign against the dengue outbreak included clean up and fumigation activities, and took place for a period of 12 days starting on 13 March. During this period, sanitary promoters planned to visit 68 districts in Asunción and 174,000 houses in other cities. The Law authorizes the MoH and the Ministry of the Environment to implement joint activities to fight the disease during its different phases, including its reproduction (an environmental issue), and medical attention to those infected (a health issue). The National Emergency



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Secretariat provided technical and financial support to these agencies, and also acted as overall coordinator of activities implemented in the fight against the disease.

### Red Cross action

At the end of January 2007, the Paraguayan Red Cross (PRC) prepared a three-month Plan of Action with the overall objective of improving the living conditions of the population affected by the dengue outbreak and helping prevent the further spread of the virus. Technical assistance has been provided by the Federation's Lima Regional Delegation and the Pan American Disaster Response Unit (PADRU). The Plan targets five departments at a regional level: Alto Paraná, Itapúa, Ñeembucù, Concepción and Amambay; and five areas at a sub-regional level: San Lorenzo, Mariano Roque Alonso, Ñemby, Itá and Capiatá, as well as the capital city of Asunción.

The PRC's Plan of Action focuses on the following actions: the provision of mosquito nets impregnated with repellent to 14 health care centres in the above-mentioned areas in coordination with national and local authorities; the organization of a national awareness-raising campaign on the donation of safe blood and prevention of the disease; awareness-raising activities at the community level; the donation of medical supplies - including blood bags and test-kits - to the medical-attention centre opened to treat dengue patients at the PRC's Mother-Child Hospital.

Activities within the Plan of Action are currently being implemented by the PRC, as the operation is midway. Actions are not expected to be increased at this time, although the PRC is closely monitoring the situation and the needs of the population. Targeted beneficiaries within the Plan of Action include those that are most seriously affected by the disease and those that are the most vulnerable. A total of 1,000 people will benefit from the distribution of mosquito nets, 400 people will benefit from medication and thousands are expected to be reached through the national awareness raising campaign and community awareness raising activities (see below for more information).

### Relief

#### **Objective 1: Distribution of 1,000 impregnated mosquito nets to health centres to protect hospitalized patients.**

From 23 February to 9 March 355 mosquito nets were distributed to more than 40 health care centres in Asunción, the Central Department, Alto Paraná, Itapúa, Ñeembucù, Concepción and Amambay. This was carried out in close coordination with the MoH.

Although there are now thousands of people diagnosed with dengue, not many people have been hospitalized with the disease. The MoH has confirmed 33 patients, although the number of people could be higher considering other health care centres across the country. Therefore the PRC has distributed the mosquito nets to more health care centres than expected, confirming the need for the mosquito nets. The remaining nets will be distributed according to the needs. There will be assessments of the use and distribution of these items in the coming days.



*PRC volunteers setting up Mosquito nets distributed to the Mother-Child Hospital*

### Health

#### **Objective 1: Affected communities benefit and increase their knowledge through national public awareness campaigns and community activities on dengue prevention.**

Awareness raising activities are taking place on two levels, through a public awareness campaign and through activities carried out at the community level. The beneficiaries of the publicity campaign are the entire population,

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as the campaign is aimed at rural and urban communities, and is being promoted in Spanish and Guaraní and to all age groups. Through community awareness raising activities, 28 communities considered the most vulnerable in the five Departments of Itapua, Concepción, Amambay, Alto Paraná y Ñeembucu and 21 other communities from the Central Department are being reached.

To date, 200 volunteers have visited 24 communities and directly reached 8,482 people. It is expected that the awareness-raising campaign (at the national public level and community level) will reach thousands more people throughout the operation.

**Table showing the total number of communities expected to be reached by the awareness raising activities at the community level:**

Department	Number of Communities
Asunción	5
Central	16
Alto Paraná	2
Itapua	4
Ñeembucu	8
Concepción	8
Amambay	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>49</b>

Overall, the PRC will mobilize 365 volunteers to undertake a national education campaign at community level on the prevention of dengue. A Regional Intervention Team (RIT) member in health in emergencies was deployed at the start of the operation to provide technical assistance to the PRC in implementing its activities. A workshop on health in emergencies and dengue prevention was organized on 10-11 February at the Central Headquarters of the PRC to train trainers from regional and sub-regional branches. Workshops replicating the methodology have been reproduced in all regional and sub-regional branches from 10-24 February, to build volunteer capacity to conduct awareness-raising talks in dengue prevention in their communities.

Awareness raising talks started on 20 February and will continue until the end of April following individual regional branches' work-plans. Community awareness raising, with trained volunteers working on a house-by-house, community-by-community basis, is taking place in 28 of the most vulnerable communities of the five aforementioned regional branches, and in 21 communities of Asunción and the Central Department.

Informative materials, including a six-page leaflet produced by the PRC are being used to facilitate awareness-raising, and for distribution to families. The design of the leaflet links elements from the national awareness-raising campaign to ensure continuity of information. T-shirts have also been produced for volunteers for visibility when carrying out activities within communities.

### **National awareness-raising campaign**

The aim of the national campaign is to raise the general public's awareness on dengue prevention and of the importance of voluntary blood donation. The campaign aims to eliminate common myths and fears prevalent in Paraguay which are due, in part, to a lack of sufficient information on the subject. The campaign was developed in coordination with the MoH and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

The story-board and concepts behind the 30-day national publicity campaign, "*Gotas de Amor*" (Drops of Love), were finalized on 19 February. Negotiations are currently underway to secure discounted spots in the media, with assistance from the First Lady's Foundation, to ensure the campaign reaches an optimum number of beneficiaries. The national mass-media awareness-raising campaign was officially launched on 15 March and will run for 30 days, however the PRC has already begun circulating information regarding its actions on dengue prevention through radio interviews and press articles on actions taken to date.

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To reach a maximum number of beneficiaries, the awareness-raising campaign will be disseminated nation-wide on television channels, radio stations and through the press. The campaign will be disseminated in Spanish and Guaraní and will target all age groups.



Above: two pages from the leaflet to be distributed to families to raise awareness about dengue and prevention measures

### Objective 2: The PRC medical-attention centre opened to treat those affected by dengue, benefits from the provision of medication and other supplies required to effectively treat the disease.

Two 24-hour medical attention centres at the Mother-Child Hospital of the PRC in Asunción were opened on 19 February to diagnose, treat and transfer dengue patients. Both centres are located in the same place but one treats adults and the other children. Treatment is provided free of charge in both centres, in order of urgency, and particular attention is provided to those from the most vulnerable sectors of society.

Thanks to support from Swiss Red Cross, medicine and other medical items (blood bags for extraction and transfusion, test kits and syringes) for potential patients of classic and hemorrhagic dengue have been provided to the medical attention centres and are being used according to the demand. The medication will ensure that 400 people with dengue can be treated.

As of 9 March, 85 patients had been treated at these medical facilities. Of the cases registered 20 percent are children and 80percent are women. There have been no cases of the hemorrhagic strain of the virus, and no transferrals to other hospitals since the centres opened.

In addition to diagnosis, treatment and transferral of patients, the centres provide information on the prevention of dengue to the general public.

### Coordination

The National Society in Paraguay is coordinating on a regular basis with the MoH and is sharing statistics on existing and potential dengue patients treated at the Mother-Child Hospital. The PRC have held several meetings with the MoH and PAHO in order to coordinate and synchronize all of the activities within the Plan of Action. Similarly, at the regional level each branch has coordinated closely with community leaders and with the relevant regional health assistance centres in order to respond to needs, as well as with the local authorities to ensure that all activities undertaken are in support of activities promoted by the Government.

The PRC continues to coordinate with the Federation's Regional Delegation in Lima and with PADRU, who have jointly provided technical support in the design, organization and implementation of the activities.

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### **Communication**

A communications plan has been developed by the PRC with support from the Lima Regional Delegation to accompany the additional activities in response to the spread of the dengue disease and has the following target audiences: affected communities, population vulnerable to contracting dengue, local authorities, donors and the Red Cross Movement.

The National Society will establish a system of reporting via mass media channels (radio, television, newspapers). The different channels of communication include national media and the PRC and Federation regional and global websites. Furthermore, information leaflets have been distributed among affected communities and t-shirts with the Red Cross and campaign logos have been designed and disseminated among Red Cross volunteers in order to increase visibility.

A situation report was published on the Federation's Disaster Management Information System (DMIS) and DREF Bulletins are available on the global Federation website.

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