

AFGHANISTAN: FLOOD RELIEF

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The disaster

At least seven provinces in Afghanistan, covering more than a quarter of the country, are affected by flooding. Each year, the arrival of spring melts the snow on the Hindu Kush and numerous mountain ranges of Afghanistan, causing the rivers to swell, flood and change course. This year, the snow-melt has been accompanied by prolonged and heavy rainfall, producing the worst flooding for many years. The floods have caused extensive damage to agricultural land, destroyed crops and washed away livestock and homes. Many thousands of flood victims are homeless and without resources. The Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) provincial branches, which have already supplied a limited amount of relief goods from regional stocks, have appealed to the Federation and ICRC delegations for assistance.

As survey teams are still in the field, the full extent of the effects of the flood is not yet known.

The affected areas

Flooding has occurred in the southern provinces of Zabul, Helmand, Nimroz, and to a lesser extent in Farah and Herat. The large and swift-flowing Helmand river and its tributary, the Arghandab, have caused most of the damage, bursting their banks in the higher reaches and flooding in the plains.

The Federation's Head of Delegation in Kabul and the Development Delegate in Kandahar visited Helmand province together with the President of the southern ARCS branches between 10 and 13 April. Two further field surveys have been conducted.

In Fariab province in the north west of the country, severe flooding occurred on 19 April as a result of the snow melt from the Tirbandi Turkestan mountain range south of Maimana which has swollen the Murghab river. The President of the northern branches of the ARCS and the Federation's administration officer left on 20 April to conduct a survey of the flooded regions and assess the most immediate needs of the flood victims.

The President of the remote ARCS Badakhshan branch in north east Afghanistan has appealed for aid to help the branch provide urgently needed aid to victims of incessant rainfall. The population lives in mud houses, the walls of which have crumbled as a result of the ceaseless rains.

Assessment of Needs

Fariab Province The ARCS branch/ Federation survey team filed the following report. The centre of Maimana and four districts including 11 villages have been seriously affected by the flooding. In all, 930 hectares of land have been inundated: 2,800 houses have been partially destroyed and 580 houses totally destroyed, and 28 mills and 5 schools have been washed away. In addition, 12 mosques were destroyed or partially damaged. Seventy persons are missing and 31 bodies have been recovered. A total of 3,350 cattle have been killed. It is anticipated that additional districts were affected, and further information is expected.

Immediate pressing needs are for food, plastic sheeting and/or tents.

Badakhshan Province The President of the Badakhshan branch informed the Delegation that 5% of housing in the capital, Faisabad, and the surrounding area, has collapsed as a result of constant, heavy rainfall. The rains have either washed away seeds already planted or delayed planting, which is likely to affect food production.

Immediate major needs are for plastic sheeting to provide shelter, for clothing and food.

Southern Provinces Although only part of Helmand Province has been surveyed, it is estimated that more than 200 families have been displaced by the flooding and are currently in need of food. Initial reports from the upper reaches of the river indicate that this figure will increase significantly in the coming days.

In Zabul, the ARCS has surveyed the region of Sayagez on the Arghandab river; 25 villages are affected and 600,000 m² of farmland have been inundated. According to initial reports, the homes of 130 families have been totally destroyed and many more damaged.

The main need is for food and blankets.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Fortunately, the ARCS regional branch in Kandahar and branches in Nimroz, Farah and Herat had some emergency relief stocks. The Federation Delegation sent 50 bales of clothing and a quantity of red beans and cooking oil from stocks in Herat to Nimroz Province. Cash has been made available to the President of the ARCS in Faisabad, Badakhshan, for local purchases to start the relief operation. An initial supply of plastic sheeting will be flown by the ICRC to Faisabad on 25 April.

The ARCS has medical clinics in the flood-affected provinces of Badakhshan, Fariab, Herat, Farah, Nimroz and Helmand and has provided medical treatment to victims.

The ICRC and Federation have met frequently in the last few days to discuss combining in-country resources to support the ARCS flood relief operation. At this stage it is hard to give exact quantities of relief goods required as field surveys are not complete.

The Federation has decided to meet the needs listed in the following table by allocating CHF 200,000 as a loan from the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF). Should funding needs exceed this amount an international appeal may be launched .

ITEM	QUANTITY
Plastic sheeting	820 rolls
Food	Under survey
Wheat Flour	4,100 families for 1 month
Bales of Clothing	410 bales
Blankets	4,100
Transportation/labour	n/a

Goods will be transported to Fariab Province from Mazar-i-Sharif and relief items supplied to Zabul and Helmand Province from Kandahar. The ICRC is also actively assisting this relief operation. Since Badakhshan is so isolated, it will fly in relief items, and blankets may be supplied from Mazar-i-Sharif.

Conclusion

Natural disasters such as this are the direct result of the lack of a long-term national policy in Afghanistan to maintain the mountain ecosystems and its biodiversity. Deforestation, poor water catchment management, over-grazing and ploughing of unstable mountain slopes in Afghanistan are man-made factors which are contributing to ever-increasing risks of natural disasters. Such disasters strike frequently, adding to the suffering and hardship of an extremely poor population who even in normal conditions must struggle for survival.

Donor National Societies are urged to assist the flood victims by making cash contributions that will finance the assistance outlined in this report and enable the DREF loan to be reimbursed.

The capacity of the ARCS has been considerably strengthened over the last two and a half years. Today the National Society, with the guidance of Federation and ICRC personnel, is in a position to implement a medium scale relief operation.

We will keep you informed of any further developments.

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