

COLOMBIA - FLOODS

Summary

Since January heavy rains have affected many parts of Colombia causing widespread damage due to flooding, and landslides. Over 200,000 persons have been directly affected losing their homes, crops and livestock. The rains continue and more are predicted as a result of the "El Niño effect". The Colombian Red Cross together with other NGO's and their Government has been providing assistance via their branches since January 1996. They have distributed from their regional warehouses and from the central warehouse in Bogota. Additional items have been purchased, and funds have been raised for assistance to volunteers and transport and distribution costs. The Government is providing food for distribution by the Colombian Red Cross. This operation has been growing to the point where the Colombian Red Cross now requests assistance from the Federation in the form of a grant from the Disaster Relief Emergency Funds. CHF 64.500 is being sent today.

1. The Disaster

Usually heavy rains have fallen in the provinces of Cordoba, Magdalena, Bolívar, Guajira, Sucre, Atlántico, César and part of Antioquía beginning already in January of this year. During June and July rains intensified causing heavy flooding and destroying crops, livestock along with homes of the poor, cutting off some villages and rural areas. A series of mud slides has increased the death and destruction. To date there are over 200,000 persons directly affected by these disasters. At present 36,000 hectares are under water. Temporary shelters have been opened although many of the families do not want to leave their homes. The rains continue and more rain is predicted.

2. Response in favour of the victims until today

The Colombian Red Cross began their assistance programme already in January via the volunteers and staff in the branches in the affected provinces. Relief items in regional warehouses were distributed and additional relief items have been sent from the Central

Warehouse in Bogota. Items include mattresses, hammocks, blankets, bedding, kitchen sets, towels, clean up kits, water containers, and clothing, at total value of CHF 195,000. 1000 volunteers have already been helping and the National Headquarters have provided them with transportation, tents, hand tools, rain wear and rubber boots, cots and life preservers at a total cost of CHF 91,000. CHF 46,800 worth of radio communications equipment has been set up in the area and CHF 30,000 has been spent on operational expenses. Together with the Ministry of Health, the Red Cross is also involved in health and sanitation measures, disease prevention and primary health care. The Government has provided food with a total value of CHF 104,000. The Colombian Red Cross is in constant contact with other NGO's who provide assistance. The total cost of all assistance so far to victims has been CHF 780,000.

3. Needs that have to be met

The Colombian Red Cross needs urgently an additional CHF 130,000 to continue the operation and are attempting to raise funds locally but have requested help of CHF 64,500 from the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund of the Federation. They plan to match this amount with their own fund raising efforts. Federation funds will be used for additional Relief Supplies, and volunteer and distribution expenses. It is planned that the Federation Grant will be used in the affected provinces of Cordoba, Sucre And Southern part of the Bolívar Province. The Government will continue to provide food for the Colombian Red Cross to distribute.

4. Conclusion

CHF 64,500 from the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund are being sent today to the Colombia Red Cross. Donor National Societies are requested to send their contribution in cash to the Fund so that we may continue to ensure a speedy response to disasters of this type.

For further information, please apply to the Americas Department in Geneva*.

Darrel Diedrichs
Officer
Americas Department

Santiago Gil
Director
Americas Department

* Santiago Gil, Director, Americas Department - (41) 22 730 43 91 or
Darrel Diedrichs, Officer, Americas Department - (41) 22 730 42 58