

27 December 1995

MALAYSIA: FLOODS

Information Bulletin no.01

The context

On 25 December tropical storm 'Greg' hit East Malaysia and caused the worst flooding in history in the State of Sabah on Borneo island. More than 100 people are reported to have been killed and almost 200 more are still missing. The storm, with winds reaching 70 km/h and 24 hours of heavy rainfall, caused flooding that has swept away more than 300 houses and left over 3.000 homeless. The majority of the dead have been identified as Filipino and Indonesian migrant sawmill workers living in quarters built for them along four rivers in Keningau, the area worst hit. Keningau is in-land, approximately 80 miles from the state capital of Kota Kinabalu, along the river Sungai Pampang and the worst hit victims are from nine villages along this river and/or by-rivers. The storm, which has hit the island from the South China Sea, caused also several ships to be driven to shallow waters.

Presently all communication to Keningau is cut, roads are flooded, two bridges have been washed away and telecommunications are not working yet. But other areas are hit also, including Kota Kinabalu where buildings and boats have been destroyed and damaged. People have sought refuge in churches and schools.

Latest events

A massive search and rescue action has been launched by the Malaysian authorities to find people still missing with more than 300 rescue workers deployed in the operation. These include 24 members of an elite Special Malaysian Disaster Assistance and Rescue Team (SMART), drawn from police, armed forces and the fire department. Operation involves armed forces, the Royal Malaysian Air Force, airline Sabah Air. A total of 102 bodies were recovered, but it is believed that the death toll may raise higher as the rescue operation continues. Conditions for rescue work have improved as the wind has scaled down since 8 o'clock Thursday morning (local time) and the rain has stopped.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

MRCS has local branches in both Keningau and Kota Kinabalu. It was reported that the MRCS volunteers are manning 3 centres for 1900 victims in Keningau, mainly doing

mass-cooking. 15 volunteers are packing food-stuffs for 1023 victims in the town of Tuaran, North of Kota Kinabalu, also hard hit by the storm.

300 volunteers from MRCS' VAD (Voluntary Aid Department) in Kota Kinabalu are on stand-by. Presently MRCS in Kota Kinabalu is cooking and distributing food from its own relief warehouses to 400 homeless people who have taken refuge in three centres in town. MRCS HQ is in frequent contact with the Branch which has not requested any assistance from the Peninsula as yet. Assessment of the requirements is in progress. A decision is expected later tonight or tomorrow morning.

Conclusion

The tropical storm which has hit Sabah state caused serious damage. MRCS has not yet requested for any external assistance, pending more accurate assessment of needs and role of the RC in the operation and rehabilitation efforts. The Federation will keep the donors informed, should external assistance to be required.

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