

GUATEMALA, MEXICO: Floods

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The Disaster in Guatemala

Some 56 square kms. of three departments in south west Guatemala -- San Marcos, Rethalhuleu and Escuintla -- are under water, after torrential rains caused several rivers to overflow their banks. Flooding is a seasonal happening each winter in Guatemala, but this is the first time such a vast area has been so badly affected.

San Marcos is considered to be the worst affected department. It is located along the border with Mexico, formed by the overflowing Suchiate river, which has caused severe floods on both sides of the frontier. Around 10 communities in San Marcos including Limones, Limoncitos, La Zarca, Los Faros, Los Laureles and Platanar are submerged. It is estimated that around 25,000 persons are now at risk and cut off, while an estimated 4,000 homes are threatened. Farmers in the area have already lost most of their crops and cattle and the outbreak of epidemics is feared. This loss of crops, cattle and homes is expected to have a long-term effect on an area where living conditions are already very hard

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

A total of 60 Red Cross volunteers from the Tecún Umán, San Marcos, Tejutla and Coatepeque branches, in co-ordination with the firemen and the National Committee for the Reduction of Disasters (CONRED), have been evacuating people and accommodating them in temporary shelters despite the difficulties created by the weather conditions. More than 3,000 persons are sheltered in 12 centres in Tecún Umán alone. The volunteers also provided first aid and distributed the small amounts of food and clothes immediately available to the most needy.

Thanks to an immediate response from local and international donors, the National Society was able to purchase 3,000 blankets, enough food for 2,000 persons, zinc sheeting, clothes rubber boots and medicines and despatch these supplies to the area. During the relief distributions, medical teams will check the health situation, in order to take anti-epidemic measures.

An extensive assessment of needs is underway, although it is already apparent that shelter will soon be insufficient for all the affected population. "Food, clothing and medicines are urgently needed to assist the victims. We are now appealing for local help in the national capital in order to organise a relief convoy as soon as possible," says Don Leopoldo Tavares, President of the Guatemalan Red Cross. The Coatepeque Red Cross branch is holding a local fund-raising marathon in order to finance the purchase of relief materials for immediate distribution.

Needs

Should the reassessment of needs being carried out by the GRC with the help of the Federation regional and country delegations show that international support is needed, the Secretariat would inform donors.

The Disaster in Mexico

The recent hurricanes “Isis” and “Earl” and the tropical depression “Javier” have provoked the overflow of several rivers in Mexico, causing flash floods and landslides. So far, 63 deaths have been reported nationwide. The authorities have announced a state of emergency in the States of Baja California, Veracruz, Puebla y Sinaloa, and the southern State of Chiapas, which is the most critically affected area.

Six days of non-stop rain in Chiapas has left 41 dead and 71 missing. The flooding has directly affected 35,000 and left around 700,000 inhabitants of 70 communities isolated and without electricity. Because of the destruction of bridges and roads, official sources evaluate that 50% of the affected area has not yet been surveyed. The rains are expected to continue for at least the next 72 hours.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Since the start of the hurricane season the Mexican Red Cross National Committee for Disasters has been monitoring the different weather phenomena, and issuing information bulletins and meteorological updates.

In response to the present emergency, the Mexican Red Cross, as part of the National Protection System, has been working with the army to evacuate more than 20,000 people in the State of Chiapas and accommodate them in temporary shelters where Red Cross volunteers are distributing food, clothes and blankets. Medical assistance is also being provided in order to prevent the outbreak of epidemics. The main difficulty is the isolation of many of the affected communities.

Because of the ongoing civil conflict in Chiapas, the National Society has a well established logistics system in the State that has enabled in to respond immediately to the events. Nevertheless, the Society has launched national appeals that have met with a very favourable and immediate response.

Needs

The Mexican Red Cross has stated that for the moment it has the capacity and resources to cope with the emergency. However, if the situation worsens it will evaluate the needs and possibly seek international support.

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