

INFORMATION BULLETIN



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

PACIFIC: CYCLONE HETA

6 January 2004

Information Bulletin N° 1/2004

Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) Allocated: N/A

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 over 180 countries.

For more information: www.ifrc.org

In Brief

This document is being issued for information only. The Federation is not seeking any funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.

The Situation

On 5 January 2004, Cyclone Heta recorded sustained winds of 260 km/h with gusts of up to 310 km/h, passed near Savaii, Samoa's largest island. It continued tracking towards the south east passing south of Upolu, Samoa's most populated island. The cyclone created waves of up to 5m which pounded low lying coastal areas around the country. The Samoan government has declared a state of emergency.

Low lying coastal areas have been most seriously affected. Roads have been flooded or blocked, and a substantial amount of staple crops have been wiped out, while roofs have been blown off houses. The power system was shut down overnight throughout most of the country for safety reasons, with electricity only supplied to the main hospital area. Communication and transport to affected areas continues to be a problem and is slowing down a full damage assessment.

Reports have also been received of damage to houses on one of Tonga's northern most islands, Niua Toputapu. On its current track through the Pacific Cyclone Heta was next expected to hit the small island state of Niue on Tuesday evening, local time.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The Samoa Red Cross Society (SRCS) started working immediately to assess the extent of the damage and to provide emergency relief supplies. It had been on alert since well before the cyclone arrived and has activated its disaster plan. It has been working closely with the National Disaster Council and began distributions from its stock of relief supplies as soon as the state of emergency was announced. It has been targeting the most vulnerable groups including the handicapped, the elderly, hospitals, and those in low lying coastal areas.

The SRCS have mobilised 60 volunteers also currently carrying out needs assessments alongside emergency distributions in the different areas hit by the cyclone. On Savaii, volunteers are reaching those who bore the greatest brunt of the cyclone and subsequently, have been most isolated.

Pacific : Cyclone Heta; Information Bulletin no. 1/2004

The SRCS has five containers of pre-positioned relief supplies on Samoa's two main islands. It has distributed 150 tarpaulins, 340 water containers and 340 blankets so far.

As information has come to hand, the SRCS has been updating the Pacific Regional Delegation. The SRCS is not currently seeking assistance but will require replenishment of relief supplies.

The Tongan Red Cross Society, which is on alert, had pre-positioned relief supplies in the far north of Tonga, on the island of Niua Toputapu before the Cyclone Heta arrived. It is currently sending personnel to Niua Toputapu to investigate reports of extensive damage to housing in Niua Toputapu. The Cook Islands Red Cross Society also remains on alert.

The Federation's regional delegation in Suva, Fiji, contributed CHF 3000 to the SRCS to help it carry out its assessments and mobilise volunteers. The delegation is continuing to monitor the situation in Samoa, Tonga, and the Cook Islands and to follow the progress of Cyclone Heta as it heads for Niue.

The regional delegation is in close contact with the OCHA Regional Office in Suva, and is also liaising with the New Zealand and Australia Red Cross Societies should external assistance be required.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see www.ifrc.org

For further details please contact :

- *Samoan Red Cross Society; Ms Tautala Mauala (Secretary General), Apia; Phone +685 23686; Fax +685 22676 ; email samoaredcross@samoa.ws*
- *Pacific Regional Delegation; Mr Leon Prop (Head of Delegation), Suva, Fiji; Phone +679 331 1855; Fax +679 331 1406; email ifrcfj01@ifrc.org*
- *Federation, Geneva; EunHee Cho (Desk Officer), Phone +41 22 7304392; Fax +41 22 733 0395; email eunhee.cho@ifrc.org*

All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.