

Southeast Asia: Floods

4 August 1999

Information Bulletin N° 1

The Disaster

Continuous monsoon rains since late July 1999, which meteorologists say are the heaviest in three decades, have effected Philippines, Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand. Additionally, Korea and China have also seen extensive flooding (see separate Federation Information Bulletins on Korea and China).

Philippines

In the Philippines an estimated 843,315 people have been directly effected in Metro Manila, and neighbouring provinces of Bulacan, Pangasinan, Tarlac and Olongpo City. Of this number 160,000 were evacuated and 29 are feared dead, with 34 people seriously injured in addition to 46 listed as missing. Over 1,590 houses were totally destroyed. More people are being evacuated as the flood situation worsens with continuous heavy rain. On 3 August 1999, the government declared a state of calamity in the affected areas.

Vietnam

The southern Vietnamese province of Binh Thuan was hit by a succession of heavy rain storms. The districts of Ham Tan, Ham Thuan Nam, Tanh Linh and Duc Linh were the most seriously affected, with swollen rivers and flash flooding causing havoc in rural areas and in the towns of these districts.

Thirty people are reported dead, 3,700 families have been evacuated from their homes which were either flooded (meaning that they have lost all household belongings and food stocks) or completely swept away. Initial figures indicate 1,218 houses have been completely swept away. Federation staff based in Ho Chi Minh worked with the Binh Thuan Branch of Vietnamese Red Cross (VNRC) and Professor Hoi (the VNRC Vice President) in assessing the situation and planning the Red Cross response. The initial assessment found that in the village of Ham Tan, of 225 houses, only one was left standing - the rest were swept away by a flash flood from the Dinh river. Vast areas of agricultural land have also been inundated with sand, with an estimated total of 19,750 hectares of crops lost. Ninety four fishing boats were sunk and severe damage reported to the infrastructure, with many bridges and roads washed away.

The latest reports from the UNDP/MARD (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development) are that "flood water levels on the Mekong River system will continue to rise" (UNDP/MARD report, 4 August 1999).

Cambodia

All communes in the coastal district of Kampot have been inundated with between 0.6m and 1.5m of flood waters. Two bridges have been washed away and access to the area is proving difficult. Many people remain stranded on roof tops, with only a limited number being evacuated by boat.

While there are reports of flooding in Kratie and Kampong Cham provinces, the latest information is that the rain is continuing to fall and levels in the Mekong river are continuing to rise.

Thailand

Heavy rains have also flooded Chantaburi and neighbouring provinces in Thailand, forcing the evacuation of over 90,700 people. Separate Information Bulletins have been provided by the Federation on Vietnam, China and Korea.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The respective Red Cross National Societies, assisted by the country and regional Federation delegations, are currently assisting in the initial relief efforts and collecting further information.

Philippines

The Philippines National Red Cross (PNRC) immediately sent members of its Disaster Response Team to the affected areas where they are currently assisting local authorities in evacuation and in the distribution of initial relief supplies. The PNRC is using its own transport and communication equipment.

Over 8,860 families (or 41,000 persons) have received PNRC relief supplies. Red Cross chapters in Caloocan, Quezon city, Talayan and Rizal are serving pre-cooked meals and other supplies. They are also receiving donations like bottled water, medicines, canned goods and noodles from local NGO's. Affected people are sheltered in 68 evacuation centres. A TV station is raising funds in cash and kind for the National Society to assist affected people.

A lack of rubber boats for evacuation and relief work is a constraint. The increasing number of evacuees in need of relief and possible medical assistance and the depletion of materials is fast becoming a problem.

Vietnam

The Central Committee for Flood and Storm Control (a UNDP sponsored programme for disaster monitoring in Vietnam) compiled initial damage reports from the province. The central government has released USD 357,000 for emergency assistance, primarily for infrastructure repair, emergency food rations and some relief goods. The Vietnam Red Cross released approximately USD 8,000 from their reserve fund for the provision of emergency assistance by the Binh Thuan Red Cross (a member of the local Central Committee for Flood and Storm Control). A government delegation, led by Deputy Prime Minister Phan Tan Dung, visited the province over the weekend and appealed for assistance to compliment the contribution of the Government of Vietnam.

In addition to the monetary assistance of USD 8,000, the Vietnam Red Cross plans to assist with distributions of 180 MT of rice, household items for 5,000 families, and, if possible, house reconstruction kits for 200 of the homeless families (Binh Thuan was among the provinces which were badly effected by the floods at the end of 1998, and a VNRC/Federation house reconstruction programme is in the completion phase). The total funds sought by VNRC/Federation will be in the range of USD 300,000.

Cambodia

The Cambodia Red Cross (CRC), as part of its disaster preparedness stocks, has 800 Mt. of dry food and an unspecified quantity of plastic sheets in stock at its central warehouse in Phnom Penh. However, transportation to the areas remains the key difficulty.

At the provincial level, the Cambodian Red Cross (CRC) Branch, with Red Cross volunteers, are co-ordinating with the provincial Governor and have started to mobilise boats to evacuate some of the stranded families.

While further assessments are underway and efforts to reach the people with plastic sheets and dry food will be continued, the CRC is co-ordinating its efforts with the National Disaster Management Committee and other partners.

Thailand

In Thailand, the Thai Red Cross (TRC) sent a mobile team with 15 officers and several boats to Chantaburi province to assist in evacuation and relief work. The TRC secretary-general Phan Wannamethee, joined the relief operation, distributing 9,000 food packages, 5,000 first aid sets,

medicines, drinking water and clothing. Volunteers under the "Friends in Need Volunteers" project also visited the affected areas in three helicopters of the Royal Thai Air Force and distributed 1,000 life jackets and 1,000 lunch boxes.

Needs

Given the extent of this regional disaster, the remoteness of the area flooded in Cambodia, the considerable damage in Vietnam and the depletion of stock in the Philippines, it is expected that local level appeals and possibly an international appeal will be launched in the coming days. Assessments are currently underway, and further information is being collected and will be available through the respective Red Cross National Societies and from the Federation country delegations in Hanoi and Phnom Penh, as well as the Federations regional delegation in Kuala Lumpur.

Philippines

While the PNRC has not yet requested international emergency assistance, it is rapidly depleting its stock of emergency supplies and is facing a shortage of rubber rescue boats. Following the collection of further information in the coming hours and days, the PNRC may request the Federation to launch an Emergency Appeal.

Vietnam

While the launching of an international appeal is under review pending further information, as an initial response direct requests will be made by the VNRC and the International Federation to donors based in Hanoi, as well as to ECHO who are based in the region.

Cambodia

While contact has already been made with the ECHO office in Phnom Penh, any additional requests for assistance, both nationally and internationally, will depend on the availability of further information. The CRC are currently assessing the situation and further information is expected on 5 August 1999.

Thailand

While the Thai Red Cross continues to assist the local authorities, given the current severity of the situation, the National Red Cross society has adequate resources.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
Operations Funding and Reporting Department

Hiroshi Higashiura
Director
Asia and Pacific Department

C:\TEMP\seasib1.sam

05/08/1999