

UNDAC Field Situation Report #1

May 13, 2006

I. SITUATION

While this is the normal rainy season for the interior of Suriname, this quantity of rains this early in the season is unusual. The rise in river levels happened relatively quickly, necessitating families rapid departures from their homes. However, flash flooding has not yet occurred, which accounts for the low casualty number. The National Coordination Center for Disaster Control (NCCR) reported that this flooding is the first major disaster in recent times in the interior of Suriname. Suriname was therefore not completely prepared for such a crisis. The Government of Suriname (GOS) was in the process of developing a national emergency plan when this flooding occurred.

The water level in the Tapanahony River and the Lawa River (southeast) didn't rise as much as yesterday, but is still rising in most villages. The situation in the Boven Suriname Area (south-central) seems to have stabilized. In some villages (such as Peleloe tepu) the water has declined. A thick layer of mud is left in and around the village. Some villages in the Tapanahony area are completely abandoned now. People have fled to Ga'kaba and Stoelmanseiland. Schools in these villages are functioning as temporary shelters. The population along the Marowijne River has not traditionally considered that river an international border; as such, border crossings are common.

The first cases of diarrhea were reported and confirmed today in two villages.

II. NATIONAL RESPONSE

The GOS has established a Crisis Center in Paramaribo, within the NCCR. The chairman of NCCR is Jerry Slijngard. The contact information for the Crisis Center is:

- Phone: 597-426416; 426522
- Mobile: 597-8800168
- Fax: 597-520840
- Email: nccd@surimail.sr

Today another 1,000 food packages were supplied by the NGOs and GOS. Each food package contains food for 5 persons for 1 week. In total, the NGOs and GOS have supplied about 4,800 food packages, estimated to be sufficient for 24,000 people for one week. But there are still some villages (especially in the Marowijne area) that are not fully supplied with food packages. The food packages were distributed by the Suriname military, via military outposts within the affected region. The food package contained rice, cooking oil, and water. However, with inadequate fuel and cooking materials, cooking the rice is a problem. The GOS is considering distributing military rations that do not need to be cooked (biscuits), to overcome the fuel shortage problem.

The Suriname military is also distributing hygiene materials. Chlorine tablets will be distributed over the weekend.

The Primary Health Care services in the interior of Suriname are provided by the Medical Mission (MM). They monitor health problems in the affected areas on a daily basis through radios. Of 52 medical centers in the affected region, four were affected by the flooding. However, of three of these four have returned to operational status in alternate locations, meaning 51 of the 52 medical centers are now operational.

An assessment of available medical supplies is being conducted. On the basis of this assessment, requests for medical supplies may be made. The MM has started health education programs in the affected areas to promote prevention of malaria and diarrhea. All volunteers and relief workers traveling to the affected areas receive preventive hepatitis vaccinations, impregnated bed nets, and malaria prophylaxis.

III. INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE

A seven-person United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team has deployed to Suriname supported by three Telecommunications Sans Frontieres staff members from Nicaragua. The Head of the OCHA Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean region will arrive Tuesday. The UNDAC team has established an OSOCC at the NCCR. The general OSOCC contact information is below. Individual contact numbers are also being posted to the Virtual OSOCC.

- UNDAC Email: undac.suriname@telenet.be
- UNDAC Phone: 597-424518

It was agreed to hold daily meetings between NCCR and the UNDAC team at 17:30, to prepare for a general briefing of the humanitarian community at 18:00. DMT meetings were held daily at 11:00 at the UN House. As of today, meetings will be organized on a sectoral basis.

A health coordination group has been formed. Still needed is a water and sanitation group; the UNDAC team will work to set one up with PAHO in the lead (under the leadership of their water & sanitation engineer). A disaster management expert with IDP experience from PAHO arrived yesterday.

A representative from ECHO arrived yesterday. A USAID assessment team is en route.

There is an international community meeting every day at noon.

In addition to the one million Euro pledge from the Netherlands, new pledges include 50,000 Euros from France and a \$50,000 grant from the U.S. to the Suriname Red Cross. Brazil is expected to provide a military helicopter within 24 hours. A Telethon in the Netherlands on Sunday is expected to bring private donations.

A joint UNDP/UNDAC/ECHO assessment went today to Sula on the Marowijne River (east), and will also attempt to reach Gakaba by boat. Another UNDP/UNDAC assessment went to Afobaka / Brownsweg, and will try to reach Pokigron by boat. A Ministry of Defense assessment via helicopter is also planned for today, on which one spot has been given to the UNDAC team.

An assessment by French Guyana on their side of the border is planned for today.

IV. ASSISTANCE

The NCCR reports a need for management and coordination expertise of crisis operations, in particular logistics and procurement. Also needed is cooking fuel / charcoal, since dry firewood is scarce. Potable water remains another high-priority need.

V. LOGISTICS

The greatest logistics need currently is for helicopters, because of worsening roads and airstrips. The NCCR has only one commercial helicopter at its disposal, and is leasing airplane flights from private companies. Helicopters with large lift capacity is a high-priority need.

Water transport must be done with flat-bottom, wooden dug-out canoes because of the rocky river beds. Most people in the interior have these canoes. However, many were rendered unusable, and generally do not have a large carrying capacity. Those still usable tend to be in use by the affected population, making them unavailable for relief efforts. Road transport is increasingly difficult because the roads have been affected by the rain and by the heavy trucks with relief materials.