

South Asia flood crisis: Disease outbreaks, funding shortages compound suffering of flood survivors

Kuala Lumpur/Geneva, 5 September 2017 — Hundreds of thousands of flood-affected people across Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan are struggling to survive in the aftermath of the worst flooding to hit the region in decades.

“More than five million people are struggling across South Asia after their homes have been damaged or destroyed. Whole villages have been swept away. We have a responsibility to help,” said Martin Faller, Deputy Regional Director for Asia Pacific, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

More than 41 million people have been affected by the South Asia flood disaster. Mud huts have disintegrated in the torrents of water that have flooded large areas of Bangladesh, southern Nepal, and northern India.

Flood waters are receding in many areas but there are already shortages of critical supplies, with personal food supplies swept away, crops and livelihoods ruined. Conditions are being further compounded by disease outbreaks and a lack of funds for relief activities.

“We risk a terrible secondary crisis of food shortages and disease unless we get the necessary funds to provide the help that is needed immediately,” Mr Faller said.

In Bangladesh alone, more than 13,000 cases of waterborne diseases including diarrhoea as well as respiratory infections have been reported in the affected areas over the past three weeks.

Mozharul Huq, Secretary General of the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) said: “Diseases such as diarrhoea, malaria and dengue are on the rise in some areas and we need support to prevent further death and suffering.”

“We have 20 medical teams treating the ill and injured, screening for disease but we fear that we won’t be able to reach most of the 10,000 people we hope to provide care for unless we receive further international funds and support.

“Many older people are telling us that these floods are the worst they have ever seen across many areas of Bangladesh and it’s going to take years to recover,” Mr Huq said.

More than 2,600 volunteers from Bangladesh Red Crescent, Nepal Red Cross and Indian Red Cross, have been working alongside local authorities, to provide relief and help communities prepare for further rains and floods.

In Bangladesh, BDRCS and IFRC face a critical shortfall of more than 3.2 million Swiss Francs to support the most vulnerable and seriously affected by the floods. BDRCS is also running a national appeal which is severely underfunded.

In Nepal, the Nepal Red Cross and IFRC face a shortfall of 1 million Swiss Francs to support 81,000 people living in the most seriously affected parts of the country.

In India, IFRC has released 720,000 Swiss francs from its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) in recent weeks to bolster response efforts.

“We have helped tens of thousands with provisions for temporary shelter, clean water and food but many more need urgent help,” said IFRC’s Mr Faller.

“Tens of thousands remain homeless. Many are still living in tented camps, sheltering in schools or other buildings and underneath tarpaulins. These people need our help, and we are doing all we can to meet their needs. We desperately need support from partners around the world,” Mr Faller said.

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