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## DREF operation update

### Honduras: Fire in Comayagua Penitentiary

 International Federation  
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

**DREF operation n° MDRHN006**  
**GLIDE n° [FR-2012-000028-HND](#)**  
**Update n°1 – 04 June 2012**

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC) Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) is a source of un-earmarked money created by the Federation in 1985 to ensure that immediate financial support is available for Red Cross and Red Crescent emergency response. The DREF is a vital part of the International Federation's disaster response system and increases the ability of National Societies to respond to disasters.

**Period covered by this update:** 23 February to 15 April 2012.

**Summary:** 81,792 Swiss francs were allocated from the IFRC's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) in February 2012 to support the Honduran Red Cross (HRC) in replenishing medical stocks and providing pre-hospital care to penitentiary inmates and psychosocial support to some 400 families.

The Honduras Red Cross has been able to provide first aid and pre-hospital care to 302 persons including inmates from the Comayagua prison and family members. In addition, 453 persons (inmates and family members) received psychosocial support as well as 141 Red Cross volunteers who supported the response activities.

The National Society has expressed its desired to extend the operation for an additional two weeks to conclude the replenishment of some articles. This operation is now expected to be completed by 6 June 2012. In line with Federation reporting standards, the Final Report (narrative and financial) is due 90 days after the end of the operation (by 6 September 2012).

The major donors and partners of DREF include the Australian, American and Belgian governments, the Austrian Red Cross, the Canadian Red Cross and government, Danish Red Cross and government, the European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO), the Irish and the Italian governments, the Japanese Red Cross Society, the Luxembourg government, the Monaco Red Cross and government, the Netherlands Red Cross and government, the Norwegian Red Cross and government, the Spanish Government, the Swedish Red Cross and government, the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), the Medtronic and Z Zurich Foundations, and other corporate and private donors. The Canadian Red Cross and DG-ECHO have replenished the DREF for the allocation made to this operation. The IFRC, on behalf of the Honduran Red Cross, would like to extend thanks to all for their generous contributions.

<http://www.ifrc.org/what/disasters/responding/drs/tools/dref/donors.asp>



Multi- institutional teams assisted with evacuations and relief activities during Comaguaya's penitentiary fire, Honduras.  
Source: HRC.

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## The situation

On Tuesday, 14 February at 22:50 hours local time (04:50 hours UTC) a large fire took place at Comayagua's penitentiary centre located at the department of Comayagua in central Honduras, 85km north from the capital city Tegucigalpa. The fire in the Comayagua Farm Penitentiary (Granja Penal de Comayagua) left hundreds of injured inmates and 366 persons lost their life when the fire consumed five out of ten homes of the centre. The penitentiary was home to 852 men at the time of the fire, although its real capacity was for 250. Overall, Honduras has 24 penitentiary centres with the capacity of holding 8,280 persons, however, in 2011 the system had, approximately 15,000 inmates, 160 per cent above its limit.

Technical and relief personnel from the Honduran Red Cross local branches located at Comayagua, Tegucigalpa, Siguatepeque and Jesús de Otoro, reached the centre's facilities at the time of the fire, and helped with first aid care, transferring injured people to local hospitals and recovering corpses. At first, the HRC worked on evacuating the survivors and providing first aid care to injured ones, while prison authorities secured facilities and inmates.

As relatives of the prisoners arrived to the Comayagua's penitentiary and news on the situation were scarce, tension rose and some protests occurred. It became evident to the Red Cross and other relief institutions that the families of the inmates also needed to be assisted with first aid care and psychosocial support in order to better cope with the situation.

The DREF operation is supporting the Honduran Red Cross in the replenishment of medical inputs ensuring that the Honduran Red Cross can continue providing pre-hospital care to the affected persons. In addition, the DREF is assisting the National Society to provide psychosocial support to the families of inmates as well to the volunteers that worked in the first aid activities.

## Coordination and partnerships

As the emergency situation developed, the HRC's headquarters activated their National Emergency Monitoring Centre (Centro Nacional de Monitoreo, CNM) and started to coordinate with COPECO's central office as well as with the Public Ministry. The National Monitoring Center also maintained direct and timely communications with response teams in the field, in order to count with first hand information for elaborating situation reports. These reports were shared with institutional authorities and communication media. Through their point of contact in the Public Ministry, the National Society communicated their early actions and arranged their support for the removal and identification of bodies and psychosocial support for family members through their work with International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) who sent delegates into the country.

Likewise, the Honduran Red Cross coordinated response actions with other rescue organizations and government institutions such as the Fire Department, Forensics, National Human Rights Commission, Public Health Secretariat, National Autonomous University and the Permanent Contingency Commission (COPECO), which was in charge of guiding shelter actions for families of the deceased prisoners.

## Red Cross and Red Crescent action



Volunteers of the HRC were a fundamental part in the management of bodies after the disaster. Source: HRC

The National Society, aware of the magnitude of the emergency, and bound by the Fundamental Principles and Humanitarian Values of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, developed its response capacity to offer a strong internal coordination between its different departments and branches. The HRC efficiently activated five branches: Comayagua, Tegucigalpa, Siguatepeque, Taulabe and Jesús de Otoro, all from the country's central region. More than 35 volunteers worked for 18 hours continuously during the event.

The HRC also installed a collection centre in coordination with radio stations (Emisoras Unidas) and a TV channel (Televisión). Fifteen HRC volunteers supported in the collection of donated aid for the survivors of

the fire. The collection campaign lasted for 3 days and it also helped to position the National Society and promote the work carried out by the Red Cross volunteers.

Through the support of the ICRC, the HRC donated items for the management of bodies (500 body bags, 1,000 white coats, 1,000 protective clothing, 1,000 medical hats and 1,000 surgical gloves) to the department of Forensic Medicine of the Public Ministry.

## Progress towards outcomes

Emergency health
<b>Outcome: The emergency medical needs of inmates and the psychosocial needs of 400 families of inmates affected by the fire in the Comayagua Penitentiary are covered.</b>
<b>Output 1: Inmates are provided with rapid medical management of injuries.</b> <b>Output 2: 400 families of inmates in need of psychosocial support are assisted.</b> <b>Output 3: 130 volunteers supporting activities receive psychosocial support.</b>
<b>Activities planned:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Replenish materials and tents used in the installation of mobile clinics</li><li>• Replenish and acquire new protective gear and medical supplies used in the treatment of inmates and their relatives.</li><li>• Provide psychosocial support for affected families who are installed in INFOP camp.</li><li>• Provide psychosocial support for volunteers involved in the evacuations and pre-hospital care activities.</li></ul>

**Progress:** With the support of the IFRC's DREF and the ICRC, the National Society acted in three different scenarios in order to provide to the medical and psychological needs of inmates and their families. First, volunteers were sent to Comayagua's Penitentiary Centre where they assisted with evacuations and pre-hospital care, management of bodies and psychosocial support for families of the deceased. Second, some 22 volunteers of the HRC provided support to the Attorney General's Office morgue, where the bodies of the deceased inmates were being taken for identification. As many families came to the area to wait for information on their relatives, the National Society also worked alongside other organizations to assist them with shelter, food and water, as well psychosocial support and first aid care. Later on, an additional camp, denominated "Esperanza", was installed by governmental institutions such as COPECO, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Education. In this area, the National Society also provided assistance with psychosocial support and pre-hospital care.

### Pre-hospital care

The levels of injuries and stress among the inmates and their relatives that required first aid care stretched the reserves of the HRC who exhausted its supplies in the first 24 hours after the incident. Therefore the DREF was instrumental in replenishing medical supplies, protective gear and parts for rescue vehicles and ambulances. The branches involved in pre-hospital care and body management that were assisted with these items are the branches C-2 Tegucigalpa, Comayagua, Siguatepeque, Taulabe and Jesús de Otoro.

In Comayagua, 122 persons received first aid and pre-hospital care, including 85 men, 35 women and 2 minors. Of these, 65 men and 5 were also transported to the nearest hospital centre by the National Society. In Tegucigalpa, 180 persons (25 men, 140 women and 15 minors) received first aid and pre-hospital care and 25 of the women were later transported to the closes hospital centre for further medical support. Thus, **302** persons were reached with first aid and pre-hospital care by the Honduran Red Cross.

### Psychosocial support to families of inmates

Since the start of the crises, the National Society rapidly activated its technical psychosocial support team, which was deployed to work in 2 areas of the country: a) in the Comayagua Farm Penitentiary and b) in Tegucigalpa (morgue and Esperanza camp).

In the Comayagua Farm Penitentiary, a team of seven persons conducted a preliminary assessment of the psychosocial needs. The team, first, identified persons in state of shock and crisis from the group of family members which were in front of the entry of the penitentiary to support them to cope with the situation and loss of relatives. Psychosocial support was also provided to individuals within the penitentiary's premises.

The 5-member team located in Tegucigalpa established contact with the National Autonomous University of Honduras, in order to have psychology students supporting the activities. The students received a basic induction on the fundamental principles, Safe Access methodology and the Code of Conduct in humanitarian

interventions. Ten students and a psychology professor supported the HRC team in the premises close to the morgue and in the Esperanza camp in order to provide support to the affected persons. The National Society was also in contact with the Mental Health department of the Health Secretariat in order to coordinate activities and the methodology of interventions in both locations.

In total, **453** persons have received psychosocial support as per the table below:

Location: Comayagua		
No.	People	Number of people reached with psychosocial support
1	Men	130
2	Women	60
3	Minors	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>195</b>
Location: Tegucigalpa		
No.	People	Number of people reached with psychosocial support
1	Men	50
2	Women	200
3	Minors	8
<b>Total</b>		<b>258</b>

The National Society's psychosocial support unit required mobile tents with sufficient space to provide support to the affected individuals. Through this DREF operation, it was possible to replenish 20 family sized tents (through the Regional Logistics Unit) which resulted damaged and contaminated during the emergency response activities.

### Psychosocial support to volunteers

The National Society ensured that debriefing sessions were conducted with each volunteer that supported in the activities, in order to address their psychosocial needs after the emergency. In addition, activities were carried out with the personnel and volunteers who worked on the response activities including recreational activities and games. Topics such as stigma, discrimination, motivational talks and relaxation techniques were covered. The psychosocial support interventions reached **141** individuals within the Honduran Red Cross.

No.	HRC Branch	Men	Women
1	Comayagua	18	35
2	Tegucigalpa	16	43
3	Siguatopeque	8	4
4	Jesus de Otoro	7	3
5	Taulabe	4	3
<b>Totales</b>		<b>53</b>	<b>88</b>
		<b>141</b>	

### Challenges:

- Even though the National Society was prepared with all the required documentation, there were delays in the entry of the tents into the country after their arrival to customs.

### Contact information

**For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:**

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## DREF history:

- This DREF was initially allocated on 23 February 2012 for 81,792 Swiss francs for 3 months to assist 400 families.
  - This DREF operation update n° 1 extends the operation timeframe for 2 additional weeks in order to finalize the replenishment of items.
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## How we work

All IFRC assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGOs\) in Disaster Relief](#) and the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

The IFRC's vision is to inspire, encourage, facilitate and promote at all times all forms of humanitarian activities by National Societies, with a view to preventing and alleviating human suffering, and thereby contributing to the maintenance and promotion of human dignity and peace in the world.



The IFRC's work is guided by *Strategy 2020* which puts forward three strategic aims:

1. Save lives, protect livelihoods, and strengthen recovery from disaster and crises.
  2. Enable healthy and safe living.
  3. Promote social inclusion and a culture of non-violence and peace.
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