

Alert

India – No. 25/2010

Geneva, 9 August, 2010

Deadly Flash Floods and landslides in Ladakh, north-east India

Brief description of the emergency

On Friday 6 August, a cloudburst lasting several hours triggered raging floods and landslides in normally arid Ladakh, located in the north-eastern part of Jammu & Kashmir state. ACT members report that hundreds of homes have been destroyed and people marooned. Assistance is urgently needed.

Impact

People were taken unawares by the landslides and trapped in their homes. More than 200 mud-built houses were washed away. The district hospital is submerged and the radio station damaged. Electricity cables have been snapped and telecommunication pylons have been damaged or washed away. The 5 km long *Mani* wall, a highly revered Buddhist site running through the town of Choglamsar has also been completely washed away.

The affected area stretches from the village of Phayang on the Rohtang-Leh highway to Nimoo on the Leh-Srinagar highway (a distance of more than 150 km). Five villages were severely affected in the sudden downpour and flash floods, including Choglamsar and Shapoo. Leh town was also among the worst of the areas hit.

Over 200 people are still reported to be missing from the worst-hit village of Choglamsar, 13 km from Leh city, where nearly all homes were washed away. Phayang, fifteen kilometres from Leh, was also badly hit by the flash floods and is completely submerged. Phayang's had a population of around 700 Muslim and Buddhist families before the disaster, of which 6 families are missing and presumed drowned.

Official figures report a death toll so far of around 150, though it is feared that this could reach over 500 as several far flung villages had not yet been accessed by rescue teams in the high-altitude terrain. Around 600 people are reported as missing, and at least 350 injured people are being treated in the army hospital. Many more are trapped under houses and buildings that have collapsed. About 150 labourers, employed by a contractor, are missing from Shyong village where they were lodged.

Leh has a population of 117,000 people, most of whom are taking shelter in the higher reaches of the mountains around them. The only sign of life is of army personnel and rescue workers going about their work. About 3,000 tourists in Leh town are safe and army rescue teams have been sent out for those stranded at the high altitude lakes such as Pangong Tso.

Immediate needs

The most urgent needs are food, blankets, clothes, temporary shelter and medicines. There is also an urgent need to think of medium and longer-term plans for restoring livelihoods and supporting communities to reduce the risks of such disasters happening in future. A huge challenge will be the need to re-construct peoples' houses in Ladakh before the freezing winter sets in.

National and international response:

More than 6,000 troops, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and police personnel along with the Indo-Tibetan Border Police have launched a massive relief and rescue operation. Six military aircraft, carrying relief material, rescue workers, doctors and sniffer dogs landed in Leh on Saturday 7 August.

Two teams from the Union Health Ministry, including a public health expert, two anaesthetists, two surgeons and two orthopaedic surgeons with five tones of medicines, also reached Leh from Delhi on Saturday. Civilian doctors are currently operating from the army hospital as the only civil hospital in the area is submerged.

The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) is trying to clear roads, highways and paths of debris and slush.

ACT Alliance response:

Church's Auxiliary for Social Action (CASA) and Lutheran World Federation/Lutheran Service India Trust (LWSIT) are currently getting in touch with local partners in the area while closely monitoring the situation. There are many concerns to be addressed including movement of supplies and road links that have yet to be restored as well as a dire shortage of warehousing and accommodation facilities.

CASA has local partners, including the Tibetan Relief Committee, to provide logistical and operational support. The Mountain Forum Himalayas, an apex body of NGOs working on issues of the mountain dwellers, is also lending support. Two senior CASA staff will reach Leh along with a representative of the Mountain Forum on 10 August to start setting up operations.

LWF/LWSIT plans to work with the Moravian church Ladakh, the Moravian Mission Welfare Society and Moravian Mission School in Leh.

CASA and LWF/LWSIT will be submitting proposals for a preliminary appeal within the next few days.

Any funding indication or pledge should be communicated to Jessie Kgoroadira, ACT Chief Finance Officer (jkg@actalliance.org).

Thank you for your attention.

For further information please contact:

ACT Deputy General Secretary, Jill Hawkey
(jha@actalliance.org, phone +41 22 791 6069) **or**

ACT Regional Program Officer, Michelle Yonetani
(myo@actalliance.org, phone +41 22 791 6035 or mobile phone +41 79 285 2916)