

## Recent natural disasters in Asia and the Pacific

### Samoa, Tonga, American Samoa, the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam

Updated by 2 October 2009, 12:00 hours

Madam Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I wish to report to you on the situation of the recent disasters that struck Asia during this week with terrible consequences on the people of Samoa, Tonga, American Samoa, the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam.

#### Samoa - Earthquake and tsunami 29 September 2009

A magnitude 8.0 earthquake struck off Samoa at 6.48 am local time Tuesday 29 September, followed by a destructive Tsunami of waves 15 to 20 feet high that reach up to a mile inland struck Samoa eastern coasts. This was the strongest and longest earthquake ever experienced in the history of the island.

Our colleagues in the sub-regional office in Samoa reported that “Samoa is a small country and this natural disaster has devastated the country, especially the rural communities with their livelihoods predominantly dependent on agriculture, fisheries and eco-tourism.” Samoa Prime Minister Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi noted that “the devastation caused was complete. In some villages absolutely no house was standing as achieved within 10 minutes by very powerful tsunami”.

The agriculture and fisheries outlets in the areas were mostly damaged, and many of the villagers affected were fishers and planters of taro and other root crops. The plantations were totally destroyed and fishing boats and gears were destroyed or swept away by the waves.

By 1 October, the official death toll for Samoa stood at 160 and hundreds confirmed injured of a population of about 179,000. The death toll is likely to climb as the search for survivors continue and some are still unaccounted for and it may take weeks to complete the search for the many people still missing.

FAO has joined the National Disaster Management Team among other UN Agencies for emergency relief. In responding to the disaster, FAO has fielded an experienced Emergency Coordinator from its office in Timor Leste on 2 October to Samoa and funds amounting to USD 11,000 have been drawn from the SFERA for the initial response. FAO is assessing the needs in the agriculture sector. Results expected within next week. International assistance is welcomed by the Government,

In **Tonga**, the Government of Tonga has declared a State of Emergency for Niuatoputapu, the closest island to Samoa (about 400 miles North of Nuku'alofa). The total population of Niuatoputapu is approximately 1,000 people. Tonga Defence Services have confirmed that 9 people are dead and 4 still missing. Widespread damage is also reported, including to the hospital, which the New Zealand Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management reports have been destroyed, and many coastal villages. About 90 percent of all houses destroyed. FAO is getting ready to field a mission to assess situation and needs. In **American Samoa**, there are at least 22 confirmed fatalities, in Pago Pago, the capital. US President Barack Obama has declared a “Major Disaster” and FEMA are coordinating a response.

## **Philippines – Tropical Storm Ketsana, 26 September 2009**

On 26 September tropical storm Ketsana (“Ondoy”) hit the Baler, Quezon Province in the Philippines. On 28 September the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GoRP) has declared a state of calamity in 6 regions in Ifugap and Benguet Provinces and officially requested international assistance.

According to the latest National Disaster Coordinating Council (NDCC) figures, 277 people are confirmed dead and 42 people remain missing. Over 1.85 million people (370,000 households) have been affected by the disaster.

The storm has caused significant damage to the agriculture sector, including the crop, livestock and fisheries sub-sectors. Preliminary assessments from the Department of Agriculture (DoA) indicate that over 60% of the population in the worst-affected provinces are primarily dependent on agricultural production for their livelihoods. So far the DoA reported damage of over 133,000 hectares of croplands in Luzon, bulk of which is rice. In addition, initial reports indicate that more than 500 hectares of corn farm, and nearly 5,400 hectares of high value commercial crops have been severely damaged leading to significant financial and asset losses

It is extremely urgent to get the farmers back to their fields for the next rice planting season in October-November. Any delay could negatively impact on livelihood security and lead to depletion in food supply in the next harvest season.

The NDCC and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Country Team conducted a joint rapid needs assessment in the affected areas, the results of which have been integrated in the Flash appeal which will be launched on 5 November 2009. FAO, as the Lead for the Agriculture Cluster, has proposed initial requirements of USD 4 million for the provision of agriculture/fisheries inputs to restore as soon as possible lost food crops, fisheries tools and livestock's, as well as to provide Cluster coordination support to actors engaged in agricultural and fisheries response.

FAO is establishing an Emergency Coordination Unit within its Representation in Manila. An Emergency Coordinator and Operations staff have been identified and are being fielded to support the Department of Agriculture in the Emergency Response. Funds amounting to USD 60,000 have been drawn from the SFERA for the initial response.

A new growing Typhoon, Pedeng, is moving towards the Philippines, northern Luzon region, menacing even further the already damaged regions.

## **Indonesia - Earthquake in West Sumatra 30 September 2009**

On 30 September 2009, a serious earthquake with magnitude 7.6 struck Indonesia at the coast of Padang in West Sumatra at 17.16 hrs followed by a second 6.2 magnitude earthquake at 17.38 hrs.

On 1<sup>st</sup> October the National Disaster Management Agency (BNBP) reported over 220 dead, however the death toll is dramatically increasing and national media are currently reporting more than 1,100 deaths; thousands of people have been displaced. A rapid assessment of the impact on livelihoods of farmers and fishers is being undertaken by a UN Joint Mission to Padang.

The Government of Indonesia has announced 2 months emergency state, the President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono announced that GoI welcomes international assistance that is to be coordinated through the government. The form of emergency response is being discussed with the Government (UN Flash Appeal or other), a " Response Plan" is being prepared in cooperation with the UNCT/OCHA planned to be finalized by 7 October

FAO has deployed its International Project Manager from the Banda Aceh office to join the UN Disaster Assessment Coordination Team to Sumatra today. Needs in the agriculture/ fisheries - livelihood sector are being assessed and will be reflected in the " Response Plan". The Cluster system has been activated and FAO is leading the agricultural cluster through the FAO Representation.

### **Vietnam – Typhoon Ketsana , 29 September**

Typhoon Ketsana hit Vietnam on 29 September causing considerable damage including to agriculture, fisheries and forestry. The number of casualties has raised to 92 and 19 missing. The government initially estimates damages in five of 12 affected provinces to more than \$120 million. Preliminary data on areas affected by floods includes: rice field (21,000 ha); sugar cane (11,000) forestry (25,000 ha); aquaculture area (2,300 ha).

Six Joint Rapid Assessment teams with GoV, UN and NGOs participation are ready to be deployed today to six provinces. FAO Staff is participating top assessment in two of the affected central provinces.

Other Storms are predicted for the areas already affected by typhoon Ketsana which may trigger further floods and landslides in mountainous areas

FAO has an established Emergency Coordination Unit in Vietnam supporting response actions. The national response is coordinated by the central committee for flood and storm control (CCFSC) in close coordination with the UN Disaster Risk management Programme Coordination Group on which FAO is fully represented. Two clusters (Health and WASH) have been activated. FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, as the lead of the Livelihoods/Agriculture Cluster are standing by for activation after results of the detailed needs assessment.

Madam Chair, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

You have chosen that Strategic Objective I, “Improved preparedness for, and effective response to, food and agricultural threats and emergencies” be the theme of the general debate of the forthcoming 36<sup>th</sup> reunion of the FAO conference. I would like to recall that the proportion of human-induced food crises represented 10 percent of food emergencies during the early 1980s, reaching almost 70 percent by 1993, and declining over the past 15 years. Currently, however, the proportion of food crises attributable to natural disasters (about 40 percent in 2007) is on the rise. FAO data indicate that sudden on-set disasters, particularly floods, have increased from 14 percent of all natural disasters in the 1980s to 27 percent since 2000. Worldwide, flood occurrence has risen from about 50 floods per year in the mid-1980s, to more than 200 today.

These recent tragic events in Asia remind us of the importance of FAO to invest more in building capacities of our member nations and partners in preparing for and responding to emergencies. With your support, FAO is committed to improve its performance in close partnership with relevant government institutions, NGOs and UN organizations, particularly WFP and IFAD.