

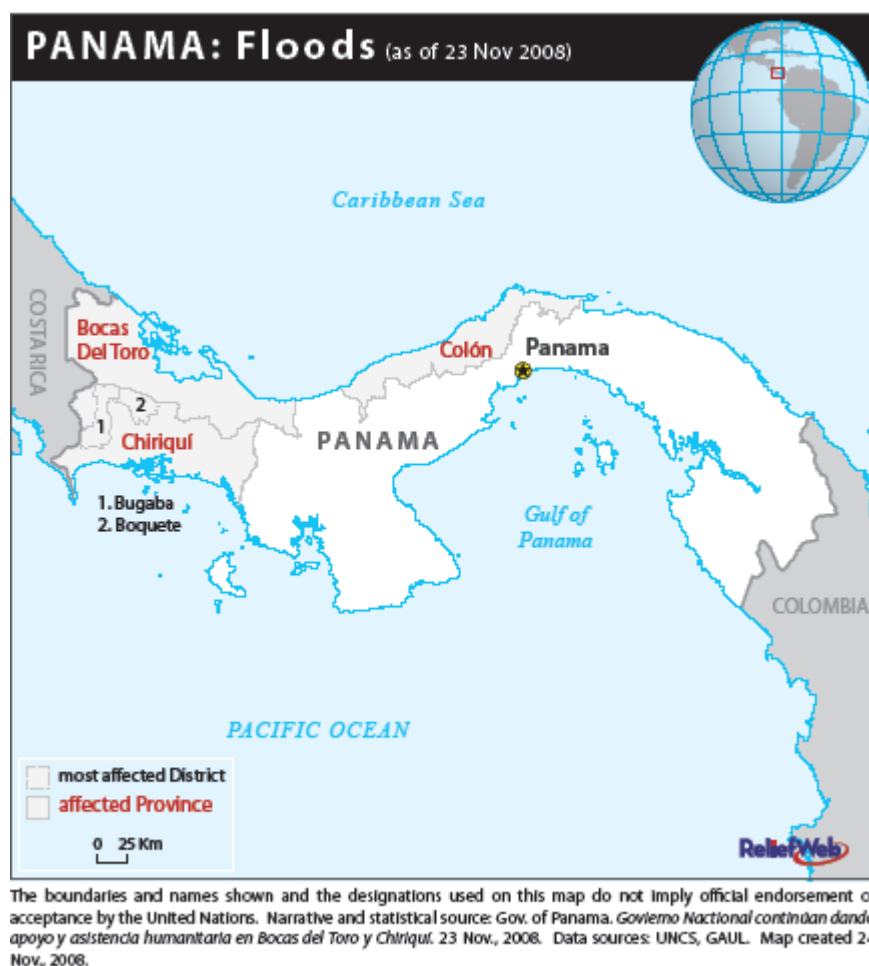


Situation Report 1 – Panama Floods
1 December 2008

This situation report is based on information received from the Resident Coordinator, UNETT, the UNDAC Team and other agencies present in Panama through their Regional Offices.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Heavy rains and floods affected more than 23,600 people and claimed 10 lives. An UNDAC Team was deployed on 29 November.**
- **Some 11,670 persons are in 44 temporary shelters. The affected population is in need of food, water, and blankets.**
- **Information management, transportation and distribution of relief remain a challenge.**



SITUATION

1. Due to a cold front, heavy rains in Panama, and subsequent flooding and landslides, have caused loss of human life, displacement, and damage to property, infrastructure, livestock and crops. The areas most affected are the



provinces of Bocas del Toro, Chiriqui, and Colon. The Pacific province of Darien has been placed on high alert as rivers there are reaching critical levels. Rains are expected to last at least until 4 December 2008.

2. To date, 10 persons died and 6 were injured. Six persons are still missing. A total of 23,614 persons have been directly affected, out of which 11,670 persons are in 44 temporary shelters. Some initial 58 shelters were set up at the onset of the emergency.

3. A number of highways and bridges have been destroyed. Some 1,165 houses were damaged and 191 houses were destroyed. As a result, a number of communities in Bocas del Toro cannot be reached. The rains and floods have also destroyed three vegetable warehouses. There is a loss of coffee growing land, vegetable lands and dairy farms. In Boca del Toro, communications are down. The total damages are estimated to be as high as USD 6 million.

4. Those in the isolated areas need food and water. Pollution by refuse materials and/or agrochemical products is a possible health threat. An increase in food prices is likely.

RESPONSE

5. The Government's response has been coordinated through the National System of Civil Protection ('Sistema Nacional de Protección Civil' - SINAPROC). The President has declared a state of emergency for Bocas del Toro, the Chiriqui highlands and the coast of Colon province. Search and rescue operation are still ongoing –158 persons were rescued so far – and community health centers were strengthened with additional personnel, water and chlorine supplies. Civil society, such as DHL and a mining company, has also supported the response efforts.

6. The UNETT deployed a seven person team to the critical sites of Changuinola (in Bocas del Toro) and David (in Chiriqui) to carry out damage and needs assessments. An UNDAC team was deployed to Bocas del Toro on 29 November, along with a REDLAC team composed of UNICEF, IOM, POHA, and WFP. The UNCT has organized itself according to sectors under the contingency plans with four sectoral tables working in nutrition, shelter, water and sanitation; food and logistics; protection and education; and early recovery.

7. In the Province of Chiriqui, David, progress has been made in moving goods to support SINAPROC through WFP, DHL and others. Some containers trucks are still unable to access Bocas del Toro; however, the government expects roads to be open for heavier transport in the next few days. The Panamanian Red Cross is using helicopters to provide assistance to approximately 400 people in isolated areas. National authorities anticipate the emergency humanitarian operation to be completed shortly and are beginning to work on recovery, infrastructure, and economic activity.

8. In the Province of Bocas del Toro, on November 30, the Red Cross dispatched 80 MT of humanitarian aid to assist 17,000 affected people. UNDAC and UNETT are meeting with ministries and local representatives in the field to ensure coordination of the different sectors. The Government of Panama has indicated that it is considering the replacement of the destroyed houses with prefabricated homes.

9. WFP's Regional Office has deployed experts, food and logistical support (such as boats and a portable storage) as well as technical assistance. DHL has deployed 3 logistics specialists to David at the request of SINAPROC. Two (2) planes on loan by Colombia are operating 6 flights/day.

10. PAHO sent blankets and experts in the field of sanitation, vector control and mental health. It will also set up a situation room at the Ministry of Health and is assisting with the SUMA set up in Boca del Toro. The health situation is reported under control by local authorities. UNFPA sent 22,000 hygiene family kits and is planning to distribute infant formula milk and food.



11. UNCIEF deployed a regional WASH expert and provided SINAPROC with 2,000 water jugs, two 1,500 litres water tanks and 1,000 water purification tablets.
12. UNHCR will provide technical assistance on shelter management, personnel, transport and communication equipment (a 4x4 vehicle, satellite telephones and non-food items).
13. BCPR, with FAO and UNEP, are coordinating assessments to identify possible rehabilitation interventions. UNDP has secured USD 100,000 for needs assessments and will deploy a technical expert on recovery and rehabilitation. OCHA will be providing cash grants to purchase immediate relief items.

NEEDS

14. While the situation in Bocas del Toro and Chiriqui is generally under control, the Government has requested assistance in analysis, evaluation, and information management as not all available information can currently be processed. The situation in Colon is still under assessment. People are returning home, however there continues to be a need for food, water, and blankets. Water distribution is a problem and the quality of water is still poor for consumption. Vectors transmission are the focus of the operation and will be further needed.
15. Transport and distribution of relief items remain a challenge and requires improvement on the coordination and registration of distributed items. David, the capital of Chiriqui province, is the reception point and dispatch centre of all goods for Chiriqui and Bocas del Toro, but storage facilities are limited. David has also been the center of the decisions with the presence of most of ministers and high level authorities.
16. The OCHA Regional Office in Panama is closely monitoring the situation and is in close contact with the Resident Coordinator and UNETT. More information can be found on Reliefweb at www.reliefweb.int and REDHUM at www.redhum.org. Humanitarian organizations and donors are encouraged to report all contributions (cash and in-kind) to OCHA's Financial Tracking Service at fts@reliefweb.int or through the on-line contribution form at www.reliefweb.int/fts, where a list of already made contributions is available.

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