July 1, 2012

Flooding in the Amazon - An Update

Dear Friends,

I want to thank everyone so very much for your generous donations to Amazon Promise to provide aid to the people affected by this year’s devastating floods. The water is receding, and the main floor of our Belen Clinic is no longer under water, thankfully. We are in a drying out process, so to speak. The people are starting to return to their houses, but it seems the second part of this disaster is just beginning.

The coming months will be difficult in the city. The receding, stagnating water and mud brings with it elevated risks for disease. During a recent dental clinic we held in Belen as part of our relief efforts, the flood waters were too low for boats to get very far, yet people were afraid to walk in the water because of contamination from sewage and fear of cutting themselves on broken glass and other sharp objects that lay in the muck. Now that the water is completely gone, another stage begins: deep mud, garbage and sewage cleanup.

Starting in the middle of May small AP assessment teams have traveled in canoes, going hut-to-hut in the lower zone of Belen to assess the situation of families that did not evacuate. These are the people who never made it up to the city into one of the tent camps and who have been living in contaminated water trying to protect their belongings. Many have experienced theft and loss. Cooking pots have floated away, and they lack wood for cooking the little food they have. The most troublesome information is the lack of potable water. Because the city shut off the water to the lower zone of Belen during the flood, the few that may have had access to running water have been left without it and have had to purchase it from vendors paddling by in canoes.

We have found many people in need of urgent medical care. Most have had no way to reach a local medical post or hospital because they were either too sick to walk, had no canoe (many canoes have been lost in the floods or stolen), or do not have the funds to pay for transportation and medical care. We held a special dental clinic and have also invited other medical relief organizations to utilize the Belen clinic building to provide further on-going care. Your donations have allowed us to reach these people and provide them with the medical care they so desperately need -- in many cases transportation to the hospital for emergency treatment (please see the photos below). To see peoples’ faces light up when we arrive has been humbling to say the least. They have been so thankful and relieved to know that someone out there is watching out for them. Watching over each other in times of need is what it’s all about!
Health Update
(Taken from the Loreto Ministry of Health weekly epidemiological report)

An alarming 485 confirmed and 898 probable cases of Leptospirosis, a bacterial disease that affects humans and animals, has taken the lives of nine people. This infection is commonly transmitted to humans by allowing water contaminated by animal urine (mainly rats in this case) to come in contact with unhealed breaks in the skin, eyes or mucous membranes. As the flood water has receded, rats have begun to invade the houses. Even the Amazon Promise team has not been spared. During the week of May 26th, our dear friend and AP maintenance man Rafael who has also been helping us with relief work, was admitted to the ER in Iquitos with a high fever, intense headache, nausea and difficulty breathing. He was diagnosed with leptospirosis, admitted to the ICU and put on oxygen and IV antibiotics for a week.

There is also a significant increase in respiratory disease with an alarming 43 deaths from pneumonia since the flooding began, mostly afflicting children under five. This is a 58.3% increase from last year. Through the third week of June there have been 9,776 diagnosed cases of Malaria (8,286 Vivax – 1,490 Falciparum). There have been 5,089 more cases of malaria this year than last – a 108.6 % percent increase. The Ministry of Health reported over 1,000 cases in the first week of June alone. Rates of Vivax are up 137 percent and Falciparum up 67.89 percent higher than 2011 at this time of year. Treated mosquito nets are in high demand and have shown to lower malaria rates as much as 75%.

Not surprisingly, there is an increase of acute diarrhea due to the flooding. Ministry of Health hospitals and medical posts have reported 33,070 cases, 5635 more cases than last year, an increase of 22%. As the water continues to go down, these levels are expected to rise.

For the people living in the jungle, this will be a particularly difficult year. The floods also have destroyed crops, resulting in food shortages and eliminating any surplus that would normally carry them through the dry season. Ducks, chickens and other farm animals have also perished. There have even been reports of entire houses being destroyed from the floods. The Ucayali River water that now flows into the more pristine waters of the Yarapa River has also become a major health threat. With the help of our friends at Peru Water Project, we have purchased and distributed ceramic water filters with holding buckets to families in the villages of Nuevo Loreto and Jaldar on the upper Yarapa River. These filters will help decrease the high amounts of diarrhea and other water borne diseases we have been seeing until we are able to install a permanent rainwater catchment system, which is currently being designed by Engineers Without Borders of Sonoma County, CA. We are visiting the Yarapa River villages every two weeks to assess the situation and to provide food packages and medical attention when and where necessary. Hunger will be a major concern this year.

Again, many thanks for your support and continued interest in our work in Peru. We rely on your support to continue these life-saving relief efforts, and are truly grateful for your partnership.
Sincerely,

Patty Webster
President

P.S. While we have received some contributions for this important work, this disaster is having far-reaching and long-term effects. To support Amazon Promise, our work in Peru, and our ongoing efforts to help such communities in need, please consider making a tax-deductible donation via credit card/PayPal at [www.amazonpromise.org/donate](http://www.amazonpromise.org/donate) or via mail at PO Box 1304, Newburyport, MA 01950.