

Niger: From Famine to Flood

Six weeks of severe, ongoing flooding has claimed 52 lives and displaced almost 400,000 people in Niger, a landlocked country in West Africa that was already in the throes of a major food shortage.

Torrential rains have swept away crops, tools and homes, according to news services. **Southern Baptists** have mobilized a disaster assessment team and authorized an initial release of \$25,000 in relief funds.

Many families have lost everything, said a humanitarian relief partner of Baptist Global Response who participated in the disaster assessment.

"I spoke with a lady named Fati. She is a widow and now she has lost her home and farm," the partner said. "She told me, 'We've never seen or heard of water like this. The water kept rising.

"We tried to get our things out of the house but we could only take what we could carry. We lost most of our things when our home was destroyed. We have nothing now but suffering. We have no hope and we cannot see an end to this suffering. At night, they bring me food and I can't even eat because I am so sad.'"

The chief of the Sarando area told the assessment team roughly 2,400 people have been displaced there and 190 homes destroyed. Residents have lost 60 percent of their millet and gardens, and homeless families have taken refuge in schools, with family members, or in a local church.

Niger lies in the Sahel region of Africa, which has been struggling with a food crisis. An estimated 18 million people have been suffering from food shortages, and nearly 1.5 million children facing starvation, according to UN figures.

Now Niger's people have gone from famine to flood, said Jeff Palmer, executive director of Baptist Global Response.

"Here in the United States, we are hurting with friends and family on the Gulf Coast who are enduring flooding problems from Hurricane Isaac. It brings back vivid memories of the misery Hurricane Katrina dumped on the region seven years ago," Palmer said. "With all the media coverage of American politics and now this hurricane, the plight of people in Africa's Sahel region is going virtually unnoticed.

"We're praying God will stir the hearts of people to respond with compassion to needs both at home and abroad. The people of Niger are in desperate need right now, and they need to feel the comfort of God's love in their distress."

The needs of this relief effort will exceed available funds. You can help by donating to BGR's fund for Africa Famine Relief or the World Hunger Fund.

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