



## **ASIA/INDIA - Mission to rescue and start a rehabilitation program for the people of Uttarakhand hit by the devastating floods**

Dehradun (Agenzia Fides) - The torrential rains that have hit the Indian Himalayan region of Uttarakhand are a national tragedy that has touched thousands of people. The Religious Camilliani, together with the whole Church, deeply affected by this disaster, are moving along with prayers and actions. The area most affected is in the diocese of Bijnor. Public authorities, voluntary organizations, local agencies are working together to help the population. Along with them, the new government of the Indian Province of the Religious Camilliani have decided to send aid and be the protagonist of a direct intervention in the area. In a note sent to Fides Agency by the responsables of the Camillian Task Force (CTF) India reports death and destruction. Rivers and lakes have overflowed flooding towns and villages in 168 districts hitting an area of over 37 square kilometers. Torrential rains have caused landslides in many areas, among them Srinagar, Joshimath, Chamoli, Rudraprayag, Govindghat, Kedamath, Gaurikund, Uttarkashi, destroying homes, roads and disrupting communications and transport. Hundreds of buildings have collapsed, more than 100 roads and over 40 bridges washed away by the fury of the water. The rivers and groundwater have been contaminated and cannot be used for human consumption. The main sources of water have been destroyed and people have to travel long distances to get water to drink. The survivors do not have containers where to boil the water. The risk of diseases and contamination increase, many families no longer have a toilet. In some villages only those of high caste have latrines while the poorest use outdoor latrines making infections even easier. The affected population live in makeshift dwellings, built with scrap materials and exposed to the weather conditions. The people who lived on the river were forced to seek refuge elsewhere in the highest part of the region in small and unhealthy houses. Most have also lost their job in order to survive and have nothing to rebuild homes. Unofficial news speak of more than 14 thousand deaths while authorities speak of 5748 missing persons who are now "presumed dead", making this the worst ever disaster occurred in the Himalayan region. Hindu pilgrims celebrating the Chardam Yatra, the sacred pilgrimage to Yamunotri, Sri Kedarnathji, Gangotri and Sri Badrinathji were also affected by the disaster. CTF India, led by Father Siby Kaitharan, MI, and two other religious have gone to Uttarakhand to deliver first aid and to make a first evaluation in the light of a long-term program that started as early as August 3rd and is involving 13 volunteers. The project will be divided into two phases. The first geared to provide food, clothing and temporary houses for the victims. The second, which will start within three months, will be more focused on social needs, on psychosocial support and rebuilding homes for survivors. CTF India has identified the village of Simlakala where over 107 families have lost everything. Hundreds of people are now living plastic tents waiting for the help they need. Among the objectives of the program, CTF India provides for the supply of water and food in the refugee camps, health care assistance and the construction of temporary housing. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 20/08/2013)

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