

DREF operation update



International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Egypt: Palestinian pilgrims stranded in Arish

DREF operation n° MDREG006
Update n°1
8 January 2008

The International Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) is a source of un-earmarked money created by the Federation in 1985 to ensure that immediate financial support is available for Red Cross and Red Crescent response to emergencies. The DREF is a vital part of the International Federation's disaster response system and increases the ability of national societies to respond to disasters.

Period covered by this update: 31 December 2007 to 8 January 2008.

Summary: CHF 150,000 (USD 134,230 or EUR 91,300) was allocated from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) on 31 December 2007 to support the Egyptian Red Crescent Society (Egyptian RCS) in delivering assistance to some 2,600 Palestinian pilgrims and to replenish disaster preparedness stocks.

The objective of this update is to report on the progress of the operation and the latest developments. This operation is expected to be completed by 15 January. In line with Federation reporting standards, the Final Report (narrative and financial) is due 90 days after the end of the operation (by 15 April, 2008)

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Location of Arish. Source of photo: BBC.

The situation

Palestinian pilgrims returning from pilgrimage arrived in Egypt on 30 December, mostly by ferries and through the Nuweiba port of the Red Sea. The pilgrims wanted to go back home through the Rafah border crossing point, which was the border used on their way to Mecca, but the Egyptian authorities insisted they use Aouja which is a border controlled by Israel. Later on, Egyptian officials decided to move the pilgrims to temporary camps outside the Mediterranean city of el-Arish, and when a first group of about half of them arrived, they refused to leave the buses and demanded to be allowed to go back to Gaza at once.

The first group, 1,600 pilgrims, arrived on 30 December 2007; and the second group, 1,200 pilgrims, on 1 January 2008. Temporary accommodation in youth clubs, camps, stadiums and schools was provided to them by the Governorate of North Sinai.

On 30 December, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (International Federation), together with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Office in Cairo, were contacted by the Egyptian RCS to discuss possible support and assistance. The International Federation's Regional Office in Tunis, in contact with the Middle East/North Africa Zone office temporarily based in Amman, submitted a DREF request to support this operation; and an allocation of CHF 150,000 was granted.

The situation has changed as of 2 January, due to most of the pilgrims being allowed to cross the border through Rafah as a result of several negotiations between the concerned authorities. In line with this, after discussions with the National Society, it was decided to revise the budget accordingly. Therefore, a first installment of CHF 75,000 was requested, and remaining unused funds will be returned to DREF. The allocation will be used to replenish the basic disaster preparedness stocks (relief items) of the Egyptian RCS depleted to cover the immediate needs of the pilgrims.

Coordination and partnerships

The Egyptian RCS, with its North Sinai and South Sinai Red Crescent Branches, took immediate action to support the pilgrims and provide social, psychological support and health care in coordination with government authorities. Both branches established 24 hour shifts to assist the pilgrims in need. They also mobilized youth teams (30 from North Sinai branch, 15 from South Sinai branch) already trained on relief and psychological support to provide necessary services to the beneficiaries.

After several negotiations between the concerned authorities, the pilgrims were allowed to go back to Gaza through Rafah border by busses on the afternoon of 2 January and morning of 3 January, 2008.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

The Egyptian RCS Branch in Arish was immediately involved in the humanitarian assistance coordinated by the Governorate of North Sinai. Following the first assessments made by the volunteers, the National Society deployed from their own stocks 3,000 blankets, 200 mattresses and 200 pillows. The ICRC Office in Cairo has also contributed to the operation through the procurement of 500 pillows, mattresses and hygiene kits. The International Federation's North Africa Regional Office continues to keep regular contacts with the Egyptian RCS and ICRC Office.

Progress towards objectives

The strong coordination between the Egyptian RCS branches and Headquarters, in addition to the quick deployment of volunteers and relief materials, has once more demonstrated the efficiency of the National Society and its reliability as a partner. The good knowledge of the emergency mechanism (DREF), the effective coordination within the Movement actors (rapid communication with ICRC and the International Federation), has allowed a quick response to the crisis. Thanks to the allocation of the DREF, the Egyptian RCS was in a position to cover immediate needs and to discuss its role in this operation with the national authorities. This has resulted in a short but responsive operation, respecting initial plans for the period of 30 December 2007 – 3 January 2008 in covering the emergency needs identified for the pilgrims. The Egyptian RCS volunteers' assistance in the distribution of relief items as well as the provision of psychological support has been greatly appreciated by the beneficiaries.

The Egyptian RCS has gained a large expertise through various previous operations, in addition to this one. To build on this experience, a disaster management workshop is foreseen in the region in order to support the branches and its staff to be better prepared for future crisis.

Relief distributions (food and basic non-food items)

Objective: Meals, 1,500 mattresses and 1,500 pillows are distributed to the beneficiaries, according to the assessment and selection criteria that identified actual needs.

Activities planned at Headquarters (Relief and Logistics Department) and Branch level (Arish Branch):

- Monitor the existing situation and conduct rapid emergency needs and capacity assessments.
- Develop beneficiary registration system to deliver intended assistance.
- Distribute relief supplies and control supply movements from point of dispatch to end user.
- Monitor and evaluate the relief activities and provide reporting on relief distributions.

Progress and impact: In addition to the items deployed from the own stocks of the National Society (3,000 blankets, 200 mattresses and 200 pillows), the Egyptian RCS Headquarters procured and supplied both affected branches with:

- 3,500 Blankets
- 600 Mattresses
- 600 Pillows
- 500 Floor sheets

The National Society's North Sinai Branch provided the necessary equipment for the shelters for 1,600 pilgrims (four days) as well as 1,200 pilgrims (one day); despite the difficulties faced due to the pilgrims' insistence and determination to return quickly home via Rafah border.

Three meals per day were provided to 1,200 pilgrims stranded on the ferry for two days as well as one day in temporary camps before their transport to Arish shelters.

The Egyptian RCS Headquarters also provided cash money to purchase food items and to cover the costs of transportation, communication and administration.

Challenges: The National Society Headquarters faced the anger of the pilgrims, who did not want to be temporarily accommodated in Arish. The situation was rather critical and volunteers provided psychological support to calm down the stressful climate.

In addition, the chronically repeated closure of the borders in the region is a challenge. The branches are now looking for replenishing their relief stocks within the next few days, to be able to finalise this before such a situation occurs.

Water, sanitation, and hygiene promotion

Objective: The risk of diseases of the stranded beneficiaries in Arish has been reduced through the provision of adequate sanitation as well as hygiene promotion for an estimated one or two weeks.

Activities planned by Egyptian RCS volunteers in Arish:

- Assess the existing coverage with a view of ensuring availability of an adequate water and sanitation supply.
- Provide appropriate hygiene kits for 2,000 beneficiaries in the temporary emergency shelter.
- Conduct training/information programmes for Red Cross volunteers and beneficiaries, particularly in regional hygiene promotion.

Progress and impact: The Egyptian RCS provided appropriate hygiene kits for 1,000 beneficiaries in the temporary emergency shelter and monitored the health situation together with the health authorities.

How we work

All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGO's\) in Disaster Relief](#) and is committed to the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

The International Federation's activities are aligned with its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

Contact information

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