

INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

EGYPT: TRAIN DISASTER

25 March 2002

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This Bulletin is being issued for information purposes only. A Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) allocation of CHF 30,000 has been made. The Federation is not seeking any funding or other assistance from donors at this time but bilateral assistance would be welcomed.

The Disaster

Early on Wednesday 20 February fire swept through a crowded passenger train on its way from Cairo to Upper Egypt, carrying passengers home for the El Aïd religious celebration. It was the worst train disaster in Egypt's history with a death toll of 377 and more than 200 injured. Only 238 corpses have been identified by the families and buried in their villages. Many bodies were so badly burned that they could not be identified. They were buried in a cemetery in Cairo. Altogether 62 people were hospitalised: 49 have been discharged, one died on 9 March, and 12 are still being treated. The victims were mostly poor people from villages along the Nile. The accident took place in Giza close to Cairo but most families of victims live in the Southern Governorates.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Egyptian Red Crescent (ERCS) was the first to arrive at the disaster. It was involved in providing first aid to the victims, ensuring their transport to hospitals as well as helping families to identify their dead. Nine Red Crescent branches along the river Nile mobilised hundreds of volunteers to provide food, blankets and clothing to the injured and to the families of the victims, as well as psychological support. Immediate financial assistance was given to 68 families. The volunteers also visited the injured who were taken to hospital, facilitated the transfer of some patients to specialised hospitals, and provided financial and administrative support. Psychological support continues to be provided via regular visits to the hospitalised by Egyptian Red Crescent Society (ERCS) women and youth volunteers. Local Red Crescent committee members have also been visiting families that have been affected. A young man that was paralysed in the accident, received a wheelchair from the ERCS.

The ERCS has made a survey of all 238 identified families who lost someone in the disaster. These families live in eight governorates, most of them in the southern of Egypt:

<i>Governorate</i>	<i>Number of families</i>			<i>Governorate</i>	<i>Number of families</i>		
	<i>Total</i>	<i>Main income earner</i>	<i>Other</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>Main income earner</i>	<i>Other</i>
Giza	1	1	-	Qena	37	13	24
Beni Souef	2	2	-	Luxor	1	-	1
Menya	19	11	8	Souhag	82	30	52
Assiut	79	50	29	Aswan	17	10	7

Volunteers of the ERCS, under supervision of professional consultants of the Society, have carried out a socio-economic assessment of the affected families. Their situation was evaluated taking into account age and profession of the victim, whether the victim was a breadwinner, family size, and who will now be responsible for the family's income, as well as what are the most important needs. It was found that all families were in a poor social and economic situation, and that 117 families had lost their bread-winner.

In each governorate a committee has been established by the government to follow up the situation and take decisions concerning their rehabilitation. The ERCS is a member of these committees. It will take at least two to three weeks to get a proper picture of the needs of each affected family. The immediate needs have mostly been met through an initial cash hand-out by the authorities of 3,000 to 5,000 E£ (1,100-1,800 CHF) per family, which was complemented by ERCS financial assistance to the 62 hospitalised victims, who received 200-500 E£ (75-185 CHF) each.

Because of the devastating nature of the accident it is possible that the death toll will still rise, as corpses may have been consumed by the fire. More information will emerge as ERCS volunteers interview families. The ERCS expects to focus its assistance on those families whose family member was not identified, and are thus ineligible to receive compensation or a pension from the authorities. It is estimated that 50 to 60 families will be dependent on Red Crescent assistance. In many cases this will be direct financial support, either as a lump sum to buy a means of income such as cattle, or continuous assistance, such as a pension or ensuring the education of children. For this purpose the ERCS plans to create a special fund by investing some capital, which will generate an interest to be used for long-term assistance.

The ERCS is currently working on a rehabilitation programme, in which priority will be given to families who have lost their breadwinner. The programme will include income-generating projects, such as handicraft and embroidery, milk products, breeding of goats and buffaloes, as well as small commercial enterprises. Financial assistance is also foreseen to cover school fees and transport, and youth vocational training to help them find employment. Sustained psychological support will be provided as well as physiotherapy and appropriate appliances for those who were disabled by the accident.

Needs

The Federation released CHF 30,000 from its DREF fund to cover immediate needs. Local contributions to ERCS to date amount to another CHF 30,000, which does not include funds available to other organisations that will collaborate with the ERCS in the rehabilitation phase. The ERCS will focus on those families who may not be able to get assistance from other sources due to legal or other reasons. It is to be noted that in some cases the ERCS will not be funding a project directly, but rather its technical expertise will be sought. The Society has decided not to launch an international appeal. It has assessed that an additional CHF 150,000 is still needed locally, to carry out its rehabilitation programme for the affected families. The Egyptian Red Crescent would welcome contributions from Sister Societies, and can be contacted at:

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All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>

For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.

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