

TURKEY: EARTHQUAKE

26 August 1999

appeal no. 19/99

situation report no. 7

period covered: 26 August 1999

The Red Cross Red Crescent relief and health effort on behalf of victims of the Turkish earthquake continues to build momentum, with an increasing number of people in need receiving the required assistance. Meanwhile, the Federation's assessment team report is nearing completion and a full Appeal is due to be launched next week.

The context

On 17 August at 03h02 local time a massive earthquake measuring between 7.4 and 7.8 on the Richter scale and lasting 45 seconds hit northwestern Turkey. More than 300 aftershocks were reported, some as high as 4.5 on the Richter scale. Izmit, an industrial city of one-million in western Turkey, was nearest the epicentre. But the force of the tremor was felt as far away as Ankara, the capital, some 500 km to the east, and across parts of the Balkans. Geophysicists described the quake as one of the most powerful this century, nearly rivalling the 7.9 magnitude earthquake that devastated San Francisco in 1906.

The Turkish government declared a state of emergency and requested international assistance. The International Federation first issued an Alert on 17 August, and at the request of the Turkish Red Crescent Society (TRCS) followed up by launching a Preliminary Appeal to support the Society's emergency relief operation. This preliminary appeal will shortly be followed by a full appeal once a needs assessment has been completed.

Update

As reported yesterday (Wednesday), the Turkish government has revised the confirmed death toll from the 17,997 to 12,514; apparently computer error is to blame for the higher figure. Some officials estimate the final death toll could reach 40,000. More than 27,000 people are injured and Turkey's National Security Council estimates the number of homeless or unable to return to damaged homes at 275,000. A government spokesperson has denied reports that search and rescue operations have been halted.

Overwhelmed by the crisis, Turkey has appealed for international aid, including disinfectants, tetanus vaccines, bungalows, tents, flashlights, blankets, heavy machinery for clearing rubble and garbage trucks and 45,000 body bags.

The Turkish press has been reporting growing concerns directed at the government and other authorities regarding the overall progress and impact of relief efforts. Crisis centres are now operating in the major affected areas and are coordinating relief and medical activities, and planning for winter accommodation for the thousands of homeless. For example, in Adapazari the crisis centre dispatched public health

experts to assess needs at the Emirdaq camp. International rescue and relief efforts have been given high praise. The costs of the reconstruction effort are estimated to be as high as \$20 billion, or 10 per cent of Turkey's gross national product.

A further difficulty facing the authorities centres on tents in existing camps that have been set up without ground-sheets on land that has not been prepared properly. This has led to strong media criticism, some of it directed at the TRCS. The general sanitary conditions in the camps are extremely poor. Authorities say the food supply for camps is adequate, with the TRCS providing hot meals to people in the camps and other areas.

The Turkish government crisis centre is planning to establish six camps with 3,000 tents intended to support about 75,000 people, to be consolidated from the numerous mini-camps scattered throughout the affected region.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Assessment team w

The Federation assessment team has met with the minister in charge of the crisis and visited the region affected by the earthquake, talking with medical, public health, water and sanitation officials, TRCS workers, and earthquake victims. A meeting in Istanbul last night (Wednesday) included representatives of those PNS working in-country, and served as an effective forum for discussion and agreement on further needs. The multinational composition of the Red Cross Red Crescent teams is an indication of the particularly strong comparative advantage of the Movement in responding to disasters.

Health w

Despite the recent rains, there is still no sign of epidemics, and the danger of bodies spreading disease has been overstated. The Austrian Water/Sanitation ERU will start serving five camps outside Golcuk on Saturday, and providing safe water to the inhabitants of Golcuk itself. Oxfam is supporting this ERU operation by providing technical expertise and equipment valued at around CHF 100,000; the agency has also indicated that it is prepared to increase this support if needed. The German Red Cross is working on establishing a Letter of Intent with authorities similar to the document signed by the Norwegian Red Cross ERU. The hospital kits currently en route are intended as replenishment kits, rather than for the emergency itself.

Participating National Societies w

In Adapazari there is a lack of medical infrastructure. The Spanish Red Cross is establishing a basic health unit with 40 beds, which can be divided into two centres. The Society has been asked by the Turkish authorities to place them in two separate camps. The Turkish Red Crescent is preparing the site to be operative by tomorrow (27 August).

The American Red Cross has tracing tents in Yalova and Golcuk and is setting up a third tent in Adapazari. Two groups of local volunteers have been trained, one to perform a rapid health assessment and another for tracing. Telephone services are offered where needed, as well as facilitating the transfer of messages to other countries. Most of the requests received have originated from Germany. A cooperative effort is underway between the German Red Cross and the American Red Cross to facilitate communication to families, and to develop systems within the Turkish Red Crescent.

A Japanese Red Cross team of three doctors, five nurses and three co-ordinators have been working in an emergency field clinic at Uzunçiflik Beldesi since 22 August, just a few kilometres outside Izmit. Its members are integrated with a Turkish medical team coordinated by the regional crisis centre. The team has been treating about 250 patients a day and will be leaving at the weekend as there is sufficient medical staff available locally. There are no signs of outbreak of epidemics, just a few cases of diarrhoea every day and one case of dysentery.

Logistics w

The Federation logistics co-ordinator is working from an office set up at the airport along with a full team of TRCS volunteers. A logistics assessment in the earthquake affected area is underway to verify warehouse capacities in the districts.

Relief commodities are arriving by road and sea and recent airlifts include: two emergency health kits from the American Red Cross; a consignment of tents from Oxfam; basic health kits from the Netherlands Red Cross; and a Spanish Red Cross delivery of 960 beds and 100 bed sets.

As of 24 August, 6,794 tents have arrived, including 3,310 from the Tunisian Red Crescent, 200 from the Hellenic Red Cross, 500 from the Iranian Red Crescent, 49 from the Swiss Red Cross, 130 from the German Red Cross, 105 from the Netherlands Red Cross and 2,500 from Red Cross Red Crescent Balkans stock. Another 6,000 tents are in the pipeline, including 800 three-person tents from the Swiss Red Cross due to arrive tomorrow. In addition, some 37,880 blankets have been received, including 15,980 from the Swiss Red Cross, 6,900 from the Netherlands Red Cross, 9,000 from German Red Cross, 5,000 from Iranian Red Crescent and 1,000 from the Hellenic Red Cross; another 22,519 are in the pipeline. The Swiss Red Cross is expecting 1,000 kitchen sets on 27 August, a further 2,500 more en route.

Medical supplies and relief consignments are expected from the Iranian Red Crescent and also medical items from the Finnish and Norwegian Red Cross Societies.

Outstanding needs

Shelter remains the priority. More tents and plastic sheeting are needed for the short term and prefabricated housing before winter weather starts in November; portable 'squat' toilets and hygiene parcels are also in short supply. A more detailed list of outstanding needs with quantities and time-frame will be shown in the full Appeal, due to be published next week.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The Head of Unit responsible for ECHO's operations in Turkey is being hosted and briefed by the Federation in Ankara and Istanbul during his current assessment mission.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details. If there are cash or in-kind contributions to the Appeal not reflected in this list, please inform the Federation's Operations Funding and Reporting Department of the details, including specific nature of the contribution and value.

For further information please contact the following:

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