

TURKEY: EARTHQUAKES

26 November 1999

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period covered: 22-25 November

Freezing temperatures, snow, and heavy rains are dramatically worsening the plight of the homeless in the earthquake zones. Relief efforts are being focused primarily on the provision of appropriate winter shelter. Much needed winterised tents and other shelter items shipped by Red Cross Red Crescent Societies or locally purchased are being immediately dispatched to tent city and prefabricated home settlements. Many more winter tents are still needed. Meanwhile support to health and water and sanitation facilities located in the area struck by the August earthquake continues. A series of assessment missions are scheduled for the first half of next month to advance the planning and implementation process for next year's programme.

The context

North-western Turkey, the country's most densely populated region and industrial heartland, has been struck by two massive earthquakes in less than three months. The first, on 17 August 1999 at 03h02 local, measured between 7.4 and 7.8 on the Richter scale and lasted 45 seconds. Izmit, an industrial city of one million in western Turkey, was nearest the epicentre. The official death toll stands at over 17,100, with some 44,000 people injured, nearly 300,000 homes were either damaged or collapsed, and more than 40,000 business premises similarly affected. On the day of the catastrophe, the Turkish government declared a state of emergency and requested international assistance. The International Federation immediately launched a preliminary appeal, followed by a full appeal for CHF 65 million on 8 September 1999, which remains active.

The disaster was followed by more than 1,300 aftershocks, culminating in the second quake - at 18h57 on 12 November 1999 and rated 7.2 on the Richter scale - which shook Düzce and Kaynasli counties in the north-western province of Bolu, some 100 kms to the east of Izmit for 30 seconds. The jolt was felt both in Istanbul (some 260 kms to the west) and Ankara, the nation's capital, 300 kms to the east. Although follow up to the August earthquake operation is included, this situation report concentrates primarily on Red Cross Red Crescent relief activities in response to this further tragedy in Turkey.

Update

Casualty figures from the earthquake on 12 November now stand at 749 confirmed dead and 4,948 injured. Over 5,880 houses and business are heavily or moderately damaged. In addition to some 900 buildings that collapsed, more than 1,500 are due for demolition.

Yesterday (Thursday), a cooking stove exploded and set fire to 14 tents in at settlement at Düzce; a 10 month old baby suffered severe burns and was evacuated to hospital.

With temperatures dropping to minus 8 centigrade, some reports suggest that the Turkish authorities are still seeking 25,000 winter tents. Snow is falling in the Bolu region, seriously affecting even the population of remote mountain villages, where housing damage is not as extensive as elsewhere in the disaster zone. Two days of heavy rains have also caused flooding in tent cities and prefabricated settlements in the Izmit and Yalova regions.

Although, no epidemics have yet been reported from field hospitals in the affected areas, medical staff are on alert as the tough weather conditions impact the homeless.

According to the public works and housing ministry, 1,000 prefabricated houses are being built each day and plans for 26,000 to be completed by the end of November are being maintained. The exact construction plans, locations and deadlines, however, remain unclear.

In the November quake zone, tent cities only in Kaynasli have currently been set up - five settlements, comprising 3,048 tents and a further 400 pieces in the pipeline. In addition, four settlements - 426 units, either prefabricated houses or containers - are being planned and excavation works have begun. In Düzce, around 11 tent cities are planned, including one with 3,000 tents; site preparation is underway and water-sanitation solutions are being investigated. In Bolu, at least eight tent cities are being prepared with some 3,000 tents.

Seven deputy governors to be based in the Bolu crisis centre are being appointed to coordinate water-sanitation, site planning, health, warehousing, logistics, shelter and food issues.

According to the latest information from the Prime Minister's Crisis Centre (PMCC), 33,098 tents have been distributed in the earthquake affected area of 12 November - 17,396 by the Turkish Red Crescent Society (TRCS).

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Turkish Red Crescent Society

The newly elected Turkish Red Crescent president, accompanied by the International Federation's Head of Delegation, is today (Friday, 26 November) travelling throughout the area struck by the earthquake of 12 November, meeting with local authority officials, TRCS branch representatives and victims of the disaster.

With financial support from the International Federation, the Society has just signed a contract for the local purchase of 3,000 winter tents, due for delivery in 15 days. Some 10,000 stoves, also procured with Federation funding, are being urgently distributed in the Bolu area.

With a coordination centre established in Düzce, TRCS is focusing its activities on the distribution of relief items and hot meals three times per day to 30,000 persons. Food distribution points have been set up in some tent cities already established.

In addition to winterised tents, the TRCS, working with the International Federation, has also dispatched the following items since 12 November: blankets (139,917), sleeping bags (7,195), beds (11,500), quilts

(3,609), 100,000 meters of plastic sheeting, a mobile hospital with 100 beds, a mobile clinic, portable kitchens (42), ambulances (5), generators (107), stoves (7,250), blood units (855), medicines, serum and 211.1 tonnes of food.

International Federation

At a meeting in Istanbul earlier this week attended by PNS representatives, a major assessment of the Red Cross Red Crescent operation was agreed, intended to review activities to date but equally important to advance the programme planning for next year. In the first half of December, three assessment teams coordinated by the International Federation will conduct an intensive series of field missions, interviews, and briefings with all parties and partners involved in the present operation. Analysis and subsequent recommendations will focus on health, rehabilitation/reconstruction, and disaster preparedness. On current planning, by the third week in December, programme frameworks detailing specific mid and long-term projects will be prepared.

At the same meeting, it was confirmed that the International Federation is in the process of establishing an office in Ankara, and some of the PNS representatives operational in the country will be transferring to this office in the Turkish capital from Istanbul.

Shelter: Since the start of November, almost 6,000 winterised tents have arrived in country, either funded or airlifted by Societies in Finland, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States and the British government; the pipeline, subject to some confirmations, comprises a further 7,815 pieces. In addition, the International Federation has an option to purchase another 8,000 tents, dependent on stringent quality control tests, and is also following up approaches by a number of suppliers.

Relief: Field liaison delegates temporarily based in Bolu and Düzce are continuing to support the TRCS relief effort, attending meetings with local authorities and other organisations and assessing the evolving situation. Meanwhile local procurement contracts have been placed for a variety of essential items, including: bulk food, beds, mattresses, heaters, toilet and shower containers, washing machines, office containers, lanterns, garbage containers, pallets for flooring, winter jackets and sleeping bags.

Health: Local health facilities in the Bolu region remain operational through the provision of Red Cross Red Crescent hospital tents. An International Federation health team is monitoring the situation, in readiness for interventions in the tent cities. The Federation is also coordinating the delivery of prefabricated buildings, tents and equipment in the area afflicted in the August quake, and acting as an intermediary between various interested parties, including TRCS, PNS and local health authorities.

Water and Sanitation: After assisting with the distribution of emergency equipment in the November earthquake area, together with TRCS and PNS, the Federation delegate is now assessing needs in the tent cities. In the August earthquake area, an Austrian Red Cross water-sanitation expert is building up OXFAM water tanks in Adapazari's Emirdag camp.

Outstanding needs

With relief activities in the November earthquake area settling into a routine, it has been possible to conduct an initial review of outstanding needs for the operation as a whole. The critical demand for winterised tents continues - at least another 8,000 are required for immediate use - and, as indicated earlier in this report, the International Federation has made significant funding commitments to rush temporary shelter items to the disaster zone. In addition to un earmarked cash contributions, pledges for the following commodities would be welcome: baby parcels (30,000), field beds (19,960) and kitchen sets (5,500). Specifications are available from the Federation's Logistics Department.

Contributions

See the List of Contributions attached to situation report no 29, issued on 24 November 1999.

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