

TAIPEI: EARTHQUAKE

27 September 1999

reference no. 25/99

situation report no. 1

period covered: 24 - 27 September 1999

Relief efforts are well underway by the Taiwanese Red Cross Organisation even as strong aftershocks continue to rock the island. Urgently needed sleeping bags, generators and tents have already arrived or are in transit to the worst hit areas.

The context

Over 2,100 people were killed, 8,672 were seriously injured and approximately 100,000 were left homeless as a result of the earthquake, measuring 7.6 on the Richter scale, which struck Taiwan in the early morning hours of Tuesday, 21 September.

Latest events

Several major aftershocks, one 6.8 in magnitude, rocked the island of Taiwan over the weekend killing three people and toppling several damaged buildings. Total aftershocks, 7,339 of them as of 11 am local time Sunday, seriously hampered rescue and relief work. About 170 people are still listed as missing and 1,065 more stranded in remote areas. In total 6,100 high rise buildings have been destroyed and 5,398 seriously damaged. Approximately 100,000 people remain homeless. Seismologists say the aftershocks will continue for at least two months. Despite the aftershocks the island people were overjoyed Sunday when rescue workers pulled out two others alive from the rubble of a fallen building six days after the earthquake. Officials say chances of finding the rest are slim. The government declared a state of emergency for six months to come to grip with reconstruction, recovery and rehabilitation. The decree calls on government employees and the military to help in the rebuilding efforts, allows the government to issue bonds and offer long-term, low-interest loans to earthquake victims, issue emergency identification cards and to appropriate houses, boats or cars as needed for rescue efforts. The decree also grants powers to order relief spending without parliamentary approval and severely punishes black market activities.

In Nantou and Taichung counties, the worst hit areas, thousands of homeless people remain camped in open areas in worsening sanitary conditions. Almost 90 per cent of the electricity in these area is still

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In Nantou and Taichung counties, the worst hit areas, thousands of homeless people remain camped in open areas in worsening sanitary conditions. Almost 90 per cent of the electricity in these area is still

not restored. Health authorities fear outbreaks of cholera, typhoid and other diseases. Surveillance units have been set up in all camps of over 100 people and medical centres in camps of over 500 people.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Following initial results of an assessment of needs, the International Federation on Friday launched a Request for Assistance seeking CHF 3.3 million to assist 100,000 beneficiaries. It also released CHF 200,000 from its emergency fund (DREF) for immediate procurement of the most essential items.

An aircraft is headed to Taipei from Paris today carrying an initial supply of 700 family sized tents. Another plane arranged by the Hong Kong Red Cross (a branch of the Red Cross Society of China) landed in Taipei with 2,900 sleeping bags on Sunday. The Red Cross Society of China has opened a nationally advertised bank account and telephone hotline for donations. Today, the Federation is sending another 500 tents to Taiwan from a supplier in Pakistan.

Relief materials, especially tents and sleeping bags, are being distributed to people in need. The Hong Kong Red Cross is also dispatching four generators and 640 flashlights today. An additional 1,000-2,000 tents and some generators will arrive from Hong Kong later this week. The Japanese Red Cross, which is operating a mobile dispensary in Nantou and a five-member medical team in Pigun hospital, is procuring 4,500 sleeping bags, 4,000 flashlights, and 30 generators for distribution later this week.

The Taiwan Red Cross Organisation is actively involved in relief distribution with volunteers working around the clock. In Nantou and Taichung six branches were mobilised. The bulk of the Red Cross relief items is now being bought in Taipei and these include 8,000 blankets, 16,000 tents, 10,000 kilograms of rice, canned food, 10,000 rain coats and 2,000 boxes of diapers.

The International Federation is also sending a senior liaison delegate to co-ordinate the external Red Cross and Red Crescent assistance. An information delegate has been in the affected area since last week to support the operation.

The Taiwanese Red Cross Organisation and the Hong Kong Red Cross are operating a tracing service being used by National Societies in the region, i.e. Malaysia and Singapore. The facsimile-based service is accessible at: Tel: +886-2-236 35 154. The Hong Kong Red Cross alone has received over 1,200 tracing requests. Bilingual tracing forms, in Chinese and English, can be downloaded from the Hong Kong Red Cross homepage, at and faxed to the Taiwanese Red Cross.

Outstanding needs

Preliminary results of the assessment being carried out by the International Federation, Japanese Red Cross and the Taiwan Red Cross Organisation indicate the acute need for tents and sleeping bags for the homeless, electric generators and flashlights.

These needs are the major portion of the request for assistance the International Federation sent out on Friday. The intended operation will mobilise 3,000 family six tents for the homeless, 6,000 sleeping bags, 30 generators and 6,000 flashlights.

Funds may also be required at a later stage for rehabilitation efforts given the large number of people left homeless as a result of the earthquake.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

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The Federation is in close contact with UN agencies in the field and in Geneva. Numerous interviews have been granted to international media by staff at the Secretariat and by the information delegate in Taiwan.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The International Federation will continue to support the Taiwanese Red Cross Organisation in meeting the acute needs for relief materials to assist up to 100,000 people left homeless by last Tuesday's earthquake. Assessment results will later provide information about the long-term needs of the victims.

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