

# ***TAIPEI: EARTHQUAKE***

*28 September 1999*

*appeal no. 25/99*

*situation report no. 2*

*period covered: 28 September 1999*

*Special focus on individual counties*

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*Red Cross efforts have switched from search and rescue efforts to providing those left homeless by last week's powerful earthquake and aftershocks with essentially needed relief. In addition to procuring supplies, the International Federation continues its role of co-ordinating assistance from donor National Societies. This report looks at the situation in the counties of Taipei, Taichung, Nantou, Yunlin and Changwa.*

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## ***The context***

Nearly 2,100 people were killed, 8,712 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***

All power was knocked out throughout the island in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, and major communication lines were down during the first day of the disaster, making all estimates of the extent difficult. Power plants in the worst hit areas were badly damaged, and 90 per cent of electricity in Nantou county is still down. Electricity is rationed throughout the island, in an effort to accommodate most citizens. Thousands of aftershocks have followed the earthquake, several exceeding 6.0 on the Richter scale.

Only minor damage was reported in Sunday's earthquake - measuring 6.8 on the Richter scale - mostly on buildings in Nantou and Taichung county which had sustained structural damage in the initial quake. At least two people were killed by landslides in Yunlin county, triggered by the aftershock, and six more are feared dead.

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## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent action***

The Hong Kong Red Cross (a branch of the Red Cross Society of China) has already sent 400 tents, 2,000 flashlights, 3,700 sleeping bags and four generators to Taipei - already being distributed by more than 100 Taiwanese Red Cross volunteers active in the Nantou and Taichung counties.

Tents sent by the Federation from Paris will immediately be distributed through Red Cross volunteers. Japanese Red Cross goods will arrive later this week. The Taiwanese Red Cross Organisation has furthermore requested 4,000 additional tents for survivors in the worst hit areas. The tendering process for the tents has already been initiated by the Federation and a supplier has been selected today.

The Hong Kong Red Cross branch has furthermore sent 2,000 tracing requests for missing relatives to the Taiwanese Red Cross organisation, of which 700 have already been solved.

### **Taipei county •**

Taipei city escaped unscathed from the devastating earthquake on 21 September, except for one 12-storey high building which was reduced to five floors, burying around 100 people under the rubble. More than 100 survivors were rescued from the site of the Tung Hsing building during the first day of the disaster, and over 70 bodies have been recovered. Volunteers from the Taipei Red Cross chapter, specially trained in first aid and rescue methods, have worked on site in 24-hour shifts since the earthquake struck, providing first aid to survivors and assisting fire fighters and military rescue teams to recover bodies from the rubble. Red Cross workers were the first to provide assistance to the two brothers pulled out alive from the rubble on Sunday.

One high rise apartment building also collapsed in Hsin Chuang city, in Taipei county, claiming the lives of dozens of people. Red Cross volunteers from the Taipei chapter were also involved in rescue work and first aid services on the scene from the very beginning.

### **Taichung county •**

The earthquake caused severe damage in Taichung county, claiming the lives of 1,074 people as of 24 September, according to local authorities. More than 3,200 houses were completely destroyed, leaving tens of thousands homeless. In addition, many of those whose houses remain intact refuse to live in them until the aftershocks stop, thus increasing the numbers of people staying in tents and shelters throughout Taichung city and county. One district of Taichung city, Taiwan's second largest city, was especially badly hit, and a few high rise apartment buildings in the downtown area completely collapsed, claiming the lives of hundreds of people.

Around 30 Red Cross volunteers from the Taichung chapter and from neighbouring counties were activated in Taichung disaster emergency centre in a matter of hours after the earthquake struck on Tuesday morning, and have been organising relief donations and distribution from the very first day. They have also distributed relief items received through the International Federation

### **Nantou county •**

The epicentre of the earthquake on 21 September and most of the aftershocks following it is located in the Sun Moon Lake area in Nantou county. Nantou is the second largest county in Taiwan, but most of its inhabitants live in rural areas so the death toll was not as high as in the neighbouring Taichung county. According to local officials, the earthquake claimed the lives of 846 in Nantou, and close to 2,000 were injured. All infrastructure, however, suffered severe damages - dozens of bridges collapsed, roads were cut off, only 10 percent of the county's power plants are working, water resources were destroyed, and thousands of houses either collapsed or suffered severe structural damage. Landslides, triggered by the earthquake and its aftershocks, have furthermore claimed the

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lives of at least 50 people, and cut off remote mountain villages making it difficult to provide people with relief items and medical assistance. The damage done by landslides is also feared to have serious consequences for the main industries in the county, which primarily relies on tourism and farming.

Around 40 Red Cross volunteers, from Nantou chapter and elsewhere, have worked around the clock since the first hours of the disaster, providing tents, blankets, food, water, medicine and baby supplies, especially to people living in remote rural areas. The Red Cross immediately put up their centre within the disaster emergency centre in Nantou city, and worked closely with the local rescue workers on locating people in need of aid. The Red Cross relief centre is now very well organised and ready to take on the task of distributing international relief items, such as heavy duty tents and generators.

The Japanese Red Cross medical team travelled throughout this county, providing medical assistance and support to the local health sector - mostly treating minor injuries and chronically ill patients left without any medicine. The team furthermore set up a dispensary on the site of Chio Fung (Nine Peaks) Mountain, where 41 people in seven households were buried under massive landslides triggered by the earthquake. The township had been blocked for five days. However, after rescue teams had worked on the site for a day and a half, it became clear that no survivors would be found, and the services of the team would be better utilised elsewhere.

#### **Yunlin/Changwa counties •**

Five buildings collapsed in Touliu city in Yunlin county (adjacent to Nantou and Taichung counties), leaving 21 dead and 13 still buried under rubble. One building collapsed in the neighbouring Changwa county, claiming the lives of a few people. Search and rescue work is over in these two areas, and there is no need for relief efforts as the damage was limited to these two building sites.

## ***Outstanding needs***

At least 100,000 people are believed to be homeless due to the devastating earthquake, although this estimate is subject to change as the homes of thousands of people seeking shelter in parks and school yards remain intact. Residents of Nantou and Taichung counties, the hardest hit areas, simply refuse to go home until all aftershocks are over, and civil engineers finish their evaluation of whether properties have suffered structural damages. Family-sized tents, and plastic sheeting stretched over poles, are the most common accommodation, providing little shelter from the sun, rain, and wind. Local authorities have announced that they will build temporary houses on 13 sites in Nantou and Taichung, but since such construction will take at least one month, the immediate need for heavy duty tents for the next few weeks is immense - for all those who remain outdoors. Demand for sleeping bags is also great, as well as for flash lights due to power cuts. Finding proper locations for the tents also poses problems, as most evacuees have sought shelter in school yards. It is very important that children suffering from their traumatic experience, will be able to return to school to take their mind off the serious consequences of the earthquake.

Electricity supplies remain rationed throughout the island, so generators are badly needed during the period it takes to restore the power plants in the affected areas. Authorities are also worried about sanitation conditions due to water shortage because of damaged wells, although the Japanese Red Cross medical team has, to date, not encountered any threat of epidemics. There is no shortage of drinking water and food, and medical assistance is sufficient.

## ***Contributions***

An updated List of Contributions will be provided with the next Situation Report, which will be released later in the week.

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## ***Conclusion***

Red Cross staff and volunteers are in the affected areas assisting people displaced as a result of the earthquake and subsequent aftershocks. The mobilisation of resources for the Red Cross' relief operation has gained momentum thanks to the rapid response of sister National Societies.

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