

Information bulletin

 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Egypt: Cairo Rockslides

Information bulletin n° 1
8 September 2008

This bulletin is being issued for information only. Up to 200 people are feared to have been buried under their homes after rockslides crushed a shantytown in the eastern Duwayqa area on 6 September 2008. Reports indicated that at least eight boulders - each estimated to weigh about 70 tonnes - fell from the towering cliffs overlooking the district at about 09.00 local time (07.00 GMT). 30 people have been declared dead, and 49 injured. 50 homes have been destroyed in the impoverished and densely populated Manshiyet Nasr neighbourhood. Some people are believed to be still trapped under the rubble and the police have cordoned off the area. The toll is expected to rise drastically, considering the number of missing, the dust and the difficulty of the search and rescue operation (difficult access for heavy equipment, high tensions between local population and governmental authorities).



Hundreds of people are feared to have been buried under their homes after rockslides crushed a shantytown in the eastern Duwayqa area on Saturday, 6 September.

The Egyptian Red Crescent (Egyptian RC) immediately mobilized its intervention teams and volunteers. They were deployed soon after the collapse on the site to assist the authorities during the rescue works, including transport of injured to the four hospitals selected for the operation. Egyptian RC erected a temporary camp (50 tents) managed by the National Society's volunteers to gather the affected families.

The Egyptian RC is conducting a needs assessment and will be soon determining the external assistance needed. It is expected that the National Society will request a disaster relief emergency fund (DREF) allocation to assist the operation.

[<click here to view a map of the affected areas, or here for detailed contact information>](#)

The Situation

Massive boulders crashed down on a shantytown on the outskirts of Cairo on 6 September, killing at least 30 people and burying many more under tons of rubble. The toll is expected to rise drastically; taking into consideration 50 homes had been crushed.

The collapse occurred in the early morning when most residents were sleeping; having woke up earlier to eat ahead of the daytime fast for Islam's holy month of Ramadan. The section of hill that broke away was estimated at 60 metres (yards) wide and 15 metres long. Manshiyet Nasr, one of many densely populated shantytowns, is home to 1.2 million people. Slums such as Manshiyet Nasr at the base of the Muqattam cliffs are filled with

migrants from the countryside looking for work in Cairo, which suffers from a severe housing shortage. There are periodic rock slides on the edges of the brittle Muqattam hills. In 2002, 27 people were killed in another rock slide in the same area.

Rescuers used their bare hands to shift debris in a desperate bid to search for victims while police cordoned off the area and specialist dog handlers were deployed to try to locate survivors. However, rescue teams were forced to wait for five hours for cranes and special heavy lifting machinery to arrive before they could move the rocks.

By nightfall, no heavy equipment was being used to clear debris. A single bulldozer sat stranded because it couldn't move through the narrow streets of the slums and authorities planned to demolish some buildings to clear the way. Workers brought in flood lights, indicating the rescue effort would continue into the night. The area was covered by a thick layer of dust and the scene was chaotic as men and women screamed in grief and blamed the government for a slow rescue operation.

The authorities issued order for evacuation of 4,000 families. The number of destroyed houses registered reached up to 50 houses, and the number of victims couldn't be accurately estimated because there are still many victims trapped under the debris and the rescue operation is still in process.

The government declared survivors would be transferred to new housing for the night and provided with all the necessary aid.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action



A temporary camp was erected in Manshiyet Nasr in order to host the affected families

Soon after the disaster, Egyptian RC established a relief emergency cell at its headquarters, headed by the director general and supported by the relief and logistic units. The National Society immediately mobilized its intervention teams and volunteers. They were deployed soon after the collapse on the site to assist the authorities during the rescue works.

Egyptian RC staff and volunteers provided first aid and psychological support to the victims and the families. In addition, the National Society provided 50 tents for the erection of temporary shelter for the evacuated families. 66 volunteers were organized in four teams, under the supervision of eight Egyptian RC managers.

A first group of 12 volunteers was deployed near the central morgue. A big canvas was erected for the families of victims in front of the central morgue, which all bodies were transferred to. Psychological

support was provided to the families and volunteers facilitated the administration management (flow of information to the victims and their families). A second group of 26 volunteers was present on the site collaborating and assisting the Ministries of Interior, Defense and Health.

A third group, assisted by other youth, helped in the erection of the temporary shelter, where families could be accommodated. The temporary camp is located near the youth club in Manshiyet Nasr and on 7 September 20 families were hosted in the camp. So far the camp is managed by National Society volunteers who deal with 24 hours registration desk, provision of accommodation, blankets, mattress, clothes and meals. However, due to the tense climate in the shantytown, the secretary general requested the support of the authorities in building security mechanisms for the camp and administration support particularly related to the registration of the families. The fourth group composed of 11 volunteers and was present in the four hospitals, providing psychological support to the injured as well as to the families present.

A need assessment is on going to determine the Egyptian RC assistance in the next few days. A plan of action and budget is under preparation.

The Egyptian RC President, Mrs. Susanne Mubarak, is closely supporting the operation together with the Secretary General, Prof. Mamdouh Gabr and his team. The secretary general interrupted his mission abroad and returned to Cairo, since when he has been visiting the four places where the National Society is deploying its activities and is assessing the situation.

A press release was issued clarifying the role of the Egyptian RC in supporting the authorities and victims. TV and press interviews were organized with the National Society staff and volunteers ensuring a good media coverage and visibility.

The coordination with the authorities and other relief stakeholders is going on very well, increasing the effectiveness of this operation in a difficult and tense environment.

The North Africa regional office of the International Federation was immediately in contact with the National Society's secretary general and the teams in the field, offering support and staff. So far, no International Federation staff is requested. On this basis of the needs assessment, the secretary general will review the plan of action and place a DREF allocation to continue and reinforce the support provided to the affected families.

How we work

All International Federation assistance seeks to adhere to the [Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations \(NGO's\) in Disaster Relief](#) and is committed to the [Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response \(Sphere\)](#) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

The International Federation's activities are aligned with its Global Agenda, which sets out four broad goals to meet the Federation's mission to "improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity".

Global Agenda Goals:

- Reduce the numbers of deaths, injuries and impact from disasters.
- Reduce the number of deaths, illnesses and impact from diseases and public health emergencies.
- Increase local community, civil society and Red Cross Red Crescent capacity to address the most urgent situations of vulnerability.
- Reduce intolerance, discrimination and social exclusion and promote respect for diversity and human dignity.

Contact information

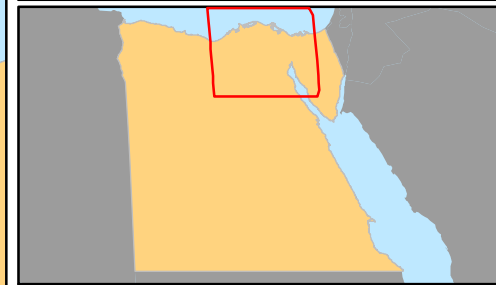
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[<Map below; click here to return to the title page>](#)



Egypt: Rockslide



Rockslide in Cairo