

AFGHANISTAN: EARTHQUAKE

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The Disaster

A number of strong aftershocks have been reported by local authorities who are now advising that more than 3100 people were killed and several hundreds injured in the earthquake that rocked northern Afghanistan 4 February at 19:33 local time. The high death toll and low injury toll is being attributed to landslides crushing down on settlements and the collapse of houses built on hillsides, and the fact that most people were inside their homes when it occurred. Temperatures in the disaster area are reaching minus 6° C. The difficult terrain and bad weather contributes to the slow access to the disaster area.

Local authorities report that they have toured 12 villages within a 10 - 12 kilometre range from Rostaq. Some of the homeless are being accommodated in intact houses although many sustained damage and may be safe. Two local surgical teams from Taloqan are treating fractures and other injuries and the health clinic is operational but overloaded.

The province of Takhar is one of four northern provinces with an agricultural base. The 500,000 residents of neighbouring province of Badakhshan are dependent upon the food produced in the area. But even with its crop production, large numbers of people living in poverty in Takhar as well. The long, on-going conflict has destroyed much of the infrastructure resulting in a significant decline in food production.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

Members of the Afghan Red Crescent Society have distributed 500 blankets and medicine to a local clinic. They reported seeing damaged buildings, makeshift morgues, and a number of injured. Local authorities were still conducting search and rescue operations.

One ICRC aircraft carrying the joint Federation/ICRC/Afghan Red Crescent Society assessment team in from the south was unable to land today due to bad weather. A ICRC/Federation team on a smaller plane did manage to land. The team has begun a 5 hour overland journey to the area. Meanwhile, the Federation/Tajikistan Red Crescent Society team from the north is waiting at the border for clearance to cross into Afghanistan.

In Kabul and Dushanbe, the ICRC, Federation, and National Societies are meeting regularly with other organisations to provide a comprehensive response to this disaster. The United Nations has

dispatched a team from Dushanbe and several trucks are carrying relief goods towards the area. MSF-Belgium has reportedly done an preliminary assessment in Rustaq where they report about 80 people are in the hospital with serious injuries. Local medical personnel are providing for emergency surgery and care.

ARCS/Federation relief stocks of medicine, tents, blankets, clothing, shelter materials, and cook sets are being moved towards the disaster area. Plans are being drawn up to airlift relief goods and personnel to the nearest airstrip. From the airstrip, transport by road, taking up to several hours, will be necessary. Logistics delegates in Afghanistan (Kabul), Pakistan (Peshawar and Islamabad), Tajikistan (Dushanbe), and the Secretariat Field Logistics Service in Geneva are all involved in the complex logistical side of the operation in close co-ordination with ICRC Logistics.

Needs

The needs of the people of Afghanistan were significant even before the earthquake struck. Health care, safe drinking water, food stocks, and infrastructure have been identified by numerous organisations as being in a critical state. The emergency situation in Takhar province is becoming increasingly desperate due to the time delays caused by travel complications and restrictions. Water and sanitation are rapidly becoming important elements.

Through local knowledge and experience, the ARCS has identified Preliminary needs are for food, clothing, shelter materials, medicine, and cooking sets. The ARCS has asked the Federation to issue an appeal for this relief effort. It is to be issued as soon as the initial assessment is done. A plan of action will be prepared for both the emergency phase and that of rehabilitation and supplementary support to assist the victims through the winter and anticipated spring floods.

The Europe and Asia & Pacific Departments are jointly following these events. Federation actions are being co-ordinated with ICRC. For further information contact Kris Hurlburt, Desk Officer at 41.22.730.42.69 or hurlburt@ifrc.org

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