

ALGERIA

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The Disaster

Large scale killings of civilians in Algeria, which began after the cancellation of elections in 1992, have left thousands of people dead and many more emotionally and/or physically wounded. The attacks intensified recently, during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan which ended yesterday.

A European Union delegation visited Algeria earlier this month to investigate ways in which the international community could help avert the bloodshed.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Algerian Red Crescent Society (ARCS) is providing assistance to the survivors of the killings in the form of first aid, relief distributions and psychological counselling. In a recent report to the Secretariat, the National Society indicates that since 1996 it has supplied assistance valued at over 22 million Algerian Dinars (CHF 528,000). In the first three weeks of this year, it has already distributed 26 tons of goods, chiefly foodstuffs and blankets.

Immediately after an attack, the Society, in co-ordination with the public authorities, is responsible for giving emergency first aid to the wounded. Afterwards, it provides relief items for all survivors, including clothing, food, tents and household items, etc. and maintains distributions as long as necessary. Many people not only lose family members, often the breadwinner, in the attacks, but also have their homes and belongings destroyed. In the longer term, the Society also provides psychological counselling to survivors.

After the emergency phase, the ARCS, once again in co-operation with the competent public authorities, assists young children who witnessed the killings and have lost their families and homes. These children suffer deep psychological scars which require specialised care. Other ARCS aid includes the organisation of local holiday camps and financial assistance for rest and recovery stays in Algeria or abroad.

Algeria has a legal support system which compensates victims of terrorism in both the emergency and rehabilitation phases. Since this system is not able to cope with all the requests for assistance, the Algerian Red Crescent is considering establishing aid centres in areas affected by terrorism. They would be fully equipped to assist children suffering from post traumatic disorders. For adults, in addition to psychological counselling, the centres would make available skills training and help with the creation of small businesses, in order to encourage social reinsertion.

Needs

The Federation Secretariat has remained in regular contact with the ARCS ever since the beginning of the fighting in 1992. The Secretariat and a number of National Societies have offered assistance in the past

but this has so far not been required by the ARCS. The President of the ARCS will be in Geneva next week to discuss issues of common interest regarding events in Algeria with the ICRC and the Federation. The Federation is maintaining an ongoing dialogue with the ICRC and with interested participating National Societies in order to identify the most effective means of assistance, should this prove necessary.

The ARCS has expressed its gratitude for the offers of support and assistance it has received for the victims of this national tragedy and will advise the Secretariat if assistance in cash or kind is required for the realisation of the psychological counselling programme mentioned above. Societies requiring further information are requested to contact Jean Ayoub at ++41 22 7304 259 and/or Robert Watkins at ++41 22 7304 251 in the Secretariat's Middle East/North Africa department.

Ann Naef
Acting Head
Appeals & Reports Service

Jean Ayoub
Acting Director
Middle East and
North Africa Department