

# ***INDIA: EARTHQUAKE***

*29 March 1999*

## ***Information Bulletin N° 1***

### ***The Disaster***

An earthquake of 6.8 magnitude on the Richter scale shook northern India at 00h 35 local time today (19 05 GMT, 28 March). The epicentre was in Chamoli district, in Uttar Pradesh, 295 km north-east of Delhi and 120 km from Dehra Dun, close to the border with China and Nepal. The earthquake was strong enough to wake up people in New Delhi and the effects were felt as far afield as Pune in Central India, nearly 1000 km away.

At least 60 people are known to have been killed, but search and rescue teams have not yet reached all of the affected areas. Scores more have been injured by the initial earthquake and a string of aftershocks. Since the first estimates indicate up to 90% of the houses have been destroyed in Chamoli, a semi-urban area of 50,000 people, officials fear they may find many more casualties. Most of the damage is expected to be within the 50 km radius of the epicentre (30.49N 79.29E). A 16 km stretch of road leading to Chamoli has been blocked by landslides and telecommunications have also been badly affected. The remoteness of outlying villages in the region is slowing access by emergency teams.

Uttar Pradesh has a population of 160 million, the largest of any state in India. In 1991, an earthquake in India's Himalayan foothills, an area known for high seismic activity, killed more than 700 people. At 6.1 on the Richter scale, that tremor was much less severe than Monday's. India's worst earthquake in recent times, in western India in 1993, killed nearly 10,000 people.

### ***Red Cross/Red Crescent Action***

Volunteers and staff of the Chamoli Branch of the Indian Red Cross (IRCS) have already gone into action. They are helping to rescue people trapped in collapsed buildings, and providing medical care and material assistance. Teams have been sent to outlying areas. The IRCS primary health care centre in Rudraprayag, 50 km to the west, has been mobilised to take in injured patients. Together with other organisations, and alongside the Government, the IRCS is obtaining an overview of the extent of the damage, and identifying the immediate and longer term rehabilitation needs.

The IRCS Headquarters and the Federation's Regional Delegation in Delhi have dispatched a health and relief assessment team from Delhi. Their assessment report is anticipated within the next 48 hours, but in the meantime the IRCS is providing almost hourly updates on the situation and its response.

#### **Government Action**

Three helicopters from the armed forces and state government flew to the area at dawn to survey the damage and evacuate the most seriously injured. A column of soldiers and 20 medical teams are also attempting to reach the site by land.

## ***NEEDS***

The assessment of the situation which is underway will determine funding needs. However, based on similar disasters in India in the past, it is evident that shelter material, medical supplies, family kitchen sets, blankets, and miscellaneous non-food items will be required. Since the flood relief operation in Uttar Pradesh has just recently been concluded stocks are still in the process of being replenished. This new disaster will therefore certainly require additional Federation assistance. National Societies will be updated as further information becomes available.

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