

TURKEY: EARTHQUAKE

14 September 1999

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situation report no. 14

period covered: 11-14 September

A major aftershock centred on the disaster zone occurred yesterday (Monday, 13 September), killing seven persons, injuring hundreds more, and causing renewed panic in the entire Marmara earthquake region. Weekly medical co-ordination meetings have started for Red Cross Red Crescent representatives, local medical authorities and other organisations in Izmit. The Vice President of the Japanese Red Cross Society (JRCS), visiting Turkey over the weekend, conferred with the JRCS medical team, Turkish Red Crescent leadership, and International Federation officials.

The context

On 17 August at 03h02 local time a massive earthquake measuring between 7.4 and 7.8 on the Richter scale and lasting 45 seconds hit north-western Turkey. Hundreds of aftershocks have since been reported, some exceeding five on the Richter scale. Izmit, an industrial city of one million in western Turkey, was nearest the epicentre. But the force of the tremor was felt as far away as Ankara, the capital, some 500 km to the east, and across parts of the Balkans. Geophysicists described the quake as one of the most powerful this century, nearly rivalling the 7.9 magnitude earthquake that devastated San Francisco in 1906.

The Turkish government declared a state of emergency and requested international assistance. The International Federation first issued an Alert on 17 August, and at the request of the Turkish Red Crescent Society (TRCS) followed up by launching a Preliminary Appeal to support the Society's emergency relief operation. A further Appeal, covering plans and proposals for the period September 1999 through April 2000 - including components for shelter, relief and health/water-sanitation assistance, rehabilitation and social welfare and disaster preparedness - was launched on 8 September.

Update

Seven persons were killed and 422 were reported injured when a strong aftershock shook the Izmit area yesterday, according to local media reports. At least 29 people are missing. The aftershock measured 5.8 on the Richter scale and lasted 20 seconds, causing many buildings (15 in Izmit, 20 in Golchuk, 6 in Adapazari, and one in Cincarcik close to Yalova), already damaged by the first event, to collapse. Red Cross Red Crescent field hospitals treated dozens of injured, and patients were evacuated from a hospital in Istanbul. Frightened residents jumped from windows and one young woman died after leaping from her office. Thousands spent the night outside, too afraid to sleep in their damaged homes, and telephone systems were inoperable. This was the strongest incident so far in some 2,610 aftershocks which have followed the first event on 17 August.

British seismologists have said it is highly likely several more powerful aftershocks would continue to hit Turkey in the coming weeks and smaller tremors could occur in the region for years to come. The British Geological Survey said while the frequency of aftershocks, estimated at currently around a dozen small tremors a day, would tail off, more occurrences similar to Monday's could be expected.

The latest official reports put the confirmed total death toll from the quake on 17 August at 15,466, with close to 24,000 injured.

The new school semester started on 13 September throughout Turkey, except in the districts most heavily damaged by the earthquake where the reopening of schools has been postponed until a later date.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

The Vice President of the Japanese Red Cross was in Turkey over the weekend, conferring with the Society's medical team, Turkish Red Crescent (TRCS) leadership, and senior International Federation officials. After meetings with TRCS and the director of the University Hospital in Golchuk, the Japanese Red Cross has pledged to provide prefabricated buildings to enable the hospital to transfer equipment and to become fully operational. The Society will also be donating vehicles, 10,000 winterised tents, and cooker/stoves for use in TRCS tent settlements, as well as 52,500 blankets, most of which will be purchased in Turkey.

Medical w

Medical coordination meeting: The first weekly medical coordination meeting in Izmit took place on 9 September, attended by representatives from various interested parties including: the Ministry of Health, the Turkish Medical Association, the International Federation, several Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies, and USAID.

The future of the two Red Cross Red Crescent field hospitals was a key topic of discussion, with general agreement on the need for more doctors and specialists. The Ministry of Health representative concurred and noted the system was under pressure due to an increasing number of patients. The German Red Cross (GRC) representative reported it will take eight weeks to prepare for winter weather, and highlighted a requirement for Turkish doctors, ahead of the time when the hospital will be locally managed. The Spanish Red Cross medical team is operating two clinics at the Emirdag tent city near Adapazari, home to 12,000 people; its representative again indicated a need for more Turkish doctors. The Japanese Red Cross medical team will be leaving the TRCS clinic at Uzunciftlik on 21 September and indicated that there is a need for Turkish specialists in paediatrics, cardiology, and orthopaedic surgery.

On the broader issues, the American Red Cross announced it will support a training-of-trainers programme for emergency planning, disaster-related mental health issues, and Red Cross Red Crescent principles for Turkish medical students at Kocaeli University, to be co-ordinated by the International Federation. Meanwhile, the Austrian Red Cross confirmed its water-sanitation emergency response unit (ERU) is producing around 200 cubic metres of water each day, which are distributed to the city of Golchuk and nearby tent settlements; two storage tanks will also be built in Adapazari.

Norwegian Red Cross ERU: Managers of the Norwegian Red Cross field hospital based in the compound of the Kocaeli and University hospitals in Izmit have offered their facilities to support these institutions. Tents, beds, two operating tables, operating lamps, one autoclave and other medical equipment will remain in the facility for another six months after the Norwegian medical team leaves later this week. A letter of intent was prepared to outline the future utilisation of the field hospital and has been presented to the Mayor of Izmit, for his signature on behalf of the city, together with representatives from the Kocaeli and University hospitals, TRCS, and Norwegian Red Cross.

Turkish medical staff have taken over the transfer of operations of the ERU. The out-patient caseload continues to increase, while for the period 3-10 September an average of 31 in-patients were treated and

36 surgeries were performed. Last week 420 body bags, 280 dust masks, 10,080 rubber gloves, three water purification systems, and 12 surgical supply kits were handed over to the TRCS in Izmit, donated by the Norwegian government.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The current edition of Newsweek magazine includes a full page advertisement urging support for the International Federation's Turkey earthquake appeal.

Outstanding needs

The International Federation's appeal, launched last week, continues to attract a strong response. Among the listed items still awaiting coverage are: mattresses (50,000), family hygiene parcels (312,000), baby parcels (40,000), an auxiliary hospital, mobile health clinics (2), and new emergency health kits (4) for these clinics, prefabricated offices for TRCS camps (25), and computers/printers for five TRCS branches. PNS are asked to contact the International Federation's Logistics Department (see number below) before making decisions on the sourcing and procurement of all outstanding items. The full list of needs is shown in Annex 2.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

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