

COLOMBIA: EARTHQUAKE

**preliminary appeal
04/99
28 January 1999**

***THIS PRELIMINARY APPEAL SEEKS
CHF 11,700,000
TO ASSIST 100,000 BENEFICIARIES
WITH IMMEDIATE RELIEF***

Summary

The International Federation and the ICRC are jointly appealing for contributions in support of the Colombian Red Cross's emergency relief operation in aid of victims of the earthquake that struck western Colombia on Monday. This preliminary appeal will be followed by a full appeal once needs assessments have been completed and more detailed information becomes available. The appeal will be administered by the Federation.

The Disaster

A powerful earthquake struck western Colombia on Monday at 13.19 hours local time (18.19 GMT). The quake, 6 on the Richter scale, was followed by a number of strong aftershocks. The area, a coffee growing region in the Andean mountains, has a total population of three million. Armenia, the capital of Quindio province, was worst hit, but the disaster area extends across five provinces, and includes 20 towns.

The Colombian Red Cross (CRC) yesterday estimated that at least 800 died in the disaster, and put the death toll in Armenia alone at 550. More than 3,400 have been injured. The Society stressed that these figures were provisional and likely to rise, since the rescue operation is still under way and bodies are still being recovered from the ruins. The CRC relief co-ordinator reported, after an aerial survey of the disaster area, that Armenia appeared to be 35 % destroyed and was "by far the worst affected place". Preliminary, unconfirmed reports indicate that some 180,000 people in the area are homeless.

The Response so far

Government Action •

The Colombian government has appealed for international aid. On Tuesday it released an initial USD 12.6 million for rebuilding.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action •

The CRC has more than 500 relief workers in the area. These include emergency medical personnel and specialised relief and rescue teams, using earth moving equipment and sniffer dogs and backed by transport resources that include four fixed wing planes and one helicopter. They are working with the police, the military and civil defence personnel on searching the rubble for survivors and evacuating the injured.

A clearing station for casualty information has been set up at Armenia airport, providing people with information on which hospital their relatives have been taken to.

The Federation has released CHF 300,000 from its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund. It immediately assigned a media delegate to Colombia and he began reporting back from the disaster zone yesterday.

The ICRC through its delegation in Colombia has provided CHF 300,000 for emergency supplies and operating costs. It has also put staff and three vehicles at the disposal of the CRC.

The ICRC continues as the lead agency for activities related to the armed conflict in Colombia.

A number of Red Cross national societies have already begun preparatory work on providing support to the CRC.

Co-ordination •

The Federation and the ICRC are working closely together to support the CRC. The Colombian government, which has declared a state of emergency, is co-ordinating relief, from national to local level; the Red Cross is ensuring that its relief operation is co-ordinated with national and local efforts.

The Intended Operation

Assessment of Needs •

CRC relief officials are surveying the affected area and expect to have a reasonably complete picture of the situation and the main needs very shortly. In the meantime, they have given a preliminary list of urgently needed emergency supplies. This includes:

shelter materials, including tents and plastic sheeting
first aid supplies, blood transfusion units and water purification tablets
clothing
foodstuffs for 100,000 people with cooking and kitchen utensils
100,000 blankets
generators and lanterns.

(For the complete list of needs, see Annex 1).

Information on rehabilitation and reconstruction activities and needs will be sent to donors as soon as possible.

Colombian Red Cross Capacity •

Emergency relief is one of the main services of the Colombian Red Cross. It has extensive experience in this area and can draw on a countrywide network of 223 active local branches -- one of the broadest coverages in Latin America -- and 110,000 volunteers. The Branches have transport, rescue equipment and relief stocks available. The Society employs 250 staff at its National Headquarters.

Red Cross Objectives •

- ◆ In this initial stage of the relief operation, the first priority is to immediately provide adequate funds to the Colombian Red Cross to enable it to go ahead with purchasing urgently needed relief items. All the supplies required can be purchased locally.

Budget summary

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

This is the most destructive earthquake to hit Colombia since 1875. It has left tens of thousands of people in urgent need of emergency assistance. Donors are urged to respond rapidly with cash donations, to enable the Colombian Red Cross to continue to respond to the needs of the injured and homeless. All contributions should be made to the Federation.

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