

ATHENS: EARTHQUAKE

**preliminary appeal
no: 22/99
8 September 1999**

***THIS PRELIMINARY APPEAL SEEKS
CHF 750,000
TO ASSIST 15,000 BENEFICIARIES
WITH IMMEDIATE RELIEF***

Summary

At the request of the Hellenic Red Cross, the International Federation is appealing for contributions in support of the Society's emergency relief operation in aid of victims of the earthquake that struck the Greek capital Athens, yesterday (Tuesday). This preliminary appeal will be followed by a full appeal once needs assessments have been completed and more detailed information becomes available. The Greek government has declared a state of emergency in the disaster zone and requested international assistance.

The Disaster

A strong earthquake struck the Greek capital Athens at 14.56 hours local time yesterday (Tuesday), measuring 5.9 on the Richter scale, lasting ten seconds and bringing death, injury and destruction in its wake. The tremor was felt as far away as Corinth, 100 km south of the city. Some 24 hours after the disaster, people are still trapped in collapsed buildings and rescue efforts are continuing, despite over 750 aftershocks since the main quake.

According to latest figures, 60 people are dead, another 600 injured (120 still in hospital) and more than 30 are listed as missing. Over 100 buildings are severely damaged, with an unknown number unsafe to use. Among the buildings that collapsed were four industrial complexes - with large numbers of employees trapped - and a nursery, where the rescue activity has been completed. The municipalities reported as suffering the most extensive damage are: Menidi, Liosia, Zefiri, Thracomacedones, Philadelphia, K.Kifissia, Metamorphosi, Petroupoli, N.Ionia and N.Erithrea.

As yet, figures for the homeless are unclear, since the official inspection of houses has not been finalised. However, the number of people who spent last night in the open was extensive, not only because of the damage but also through fear of aftershocks. Relief materials distributed included tents, bottled water, blankets, bed-sheets and food.

As reported in the Alert, issued by the International Federation last night, overloading of the telecommunications systems is causing difficulties and the government has requested the population to use this utility only when absolutely necessary. A similar situation exists with the electricity supply, due to damage to two power stations.

The Response so far

Government Action •

The Greek Government is coordinating all rescue and relief activities through the Prefecture of Attica and the municipalities. A state of emergency has been declared in the Prefecture of Attica. The search and rescue activity has been effective, with many people pulled from the rubble, though, as indicated above, more than 30 individuals are still trapped.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action •

In the immediate aftermath of the quake, the Hellenic Red Cross (HRC) began emergency activities in coordination with the government. One rescue team which was dispatched to Menidi saved two people. Some 400 tents, blankets, bed-sheets and bottled water from HRC stocks were distributed to the most affected areas, while the distribution of 6,000 meals is being carried out today.

Seven field dispensaries/relief centres have been set up in the areas of Liosia, Menidi, N. Ionia, Metamorphosi, Petroupoli, Zefiri, and Thracomacedones. Support teams for these centres comprise rescue/first aiders, doctors, nurses and social workers. Their task is to provide medical care, psychological support, and to distribute the relief material and hot meals.

Despite some structural damage to the HRC headquarters, all services are operating 24 hours per day, fully staffed. The International Federation in Geneva remains in close contact with the HRC's international director, who has also provided interviews to several media services between last night and during the course of today.

The International Federation has deployed a liaison officer from its Geneva Secretariat to work with the National Society. This evening, 3,000 mattresses (from Balkans emergency stocks) and tents were being mobilised at the request of the Hellenic Red Cross for arrival in Athens by the end of the week.

Overnight and throughout today, a number of Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies have been in touch with the International Federation Secretariat in Geneva and the Hellenic Red Cross with offers of support.

Co-ordination •

Since the onset of the emergency the International Federation has been in close contact with the Hellenic Red Cross and will work closely with the National Society to coordinate all international Red Cross Red Crescent assistance. The Greek government, which has declared a state of emergency in the Prefecture of Attica and is requesting international assistance, is co-ordinating relief, from national to local level; the Hellenic Red Cross is ensuring that its relief operation is co-ordinated with national and local efforts.

The Intended Operation

Assessment of Needs •

Greek government officials are surveying the affected area and expect to have a reasonably complete picture of the situation and the main needs very shortly. In a preliminary communication to the International Federation, the Society has requested the urgent deployment of tents and mattresses. Cash to maintain the supply of relief items - and replace existing stocks - is also needed

Hellenic Red Cross Capacity •

The Hellenic Red Cross has 107 local branches and committees, 500 paid staff, 9,000 members and 30,000 volunteers active in four key areas: first aid, nursing, social welfare and youth. The Society owns two central warehouses in Athens, each with a capacity of over 10,000 sq m. Already the Society's long experience of responding to earthquakes has proved invaluable, as demonstrated by its quick reaction to this latest disaster, through search and rescue activities and the distribution of relief items and hot meals.

Red Cross Red Crescent Objectives

- ◆ In this initial stage of the relief operation, the first priority is to immediately provide adequate funds to enable the Hellenic Red Cross to procure urgently needed relief items, including tents and mattresses.
- ◆ Subsequently funds may be required for replenishment of the Hellenic Red Cross disaster preparedness stocks and to enhance and improve still further, the Society's capacity to respond to disaster situations.

Budget summary

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

This disaster has left many thousands of people in the Greek capital in urgent need of emergency assistance. Donors are urged to respond rapidly with cash donations, to enable the Hellenic Red Cross to continue to respond to the needs of the injured and homeless. All contributions should be made to the International Federation, in its coordinating capacity for all Red Cross Red Crescent international assistance.

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