

# **DISASTER RELIEF EMERGENCY FUND**

**CHF 7,500,000**

**Programme No. 01.01/98**

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When a severe earthquake jolted eastern Iran on 10 May 1997, leaving nearly 2,000 people dead, with thousands more injured and destitute, the need for rapid emergency assistance was overwhelming. The Iranian Red Crescent is among the most disaster 'aware' and adept member Societies in the International Federation, and its staff and volunteers were quickly on the scene, treating the injured, helping the homeless and comforting the bereaved. Crucial to these essential humanitarian efforts was a grant of CHF 100,000 from the International Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF), which enabled the Iranian Red Crescent to accelerate vital relief goods into the stricken area. Subsequently, at the request of the National Society, an international appeal was launched; donors responded with alacrity and generosity and the grant was repaid.

As the number of disasters worldwide - many of them considered 'too small' for the attention of headline writers - continue to increase, calls on DREF remain broadly on an upward trend. Grants of CHF 4.8 million were made in 1993 rising to CHF 6.7 million in 1996; during 1997, to date, almost CHF 4.7 million has been advanced already for 49 projects in the wake of sudden-onset disasters which have devastated vulnerable and marginalised communities in some of the remotest corners on earth: North Korea (drought in January, a tidal wave in August), Togo (meningitis outbreak), Peru (floods), Albania (social unrest) and Myanmar (fire).

DREF is intended to be a revolving fund with loans repaid from subsequent appeals, as in the case of the Iran earthquake. At the discretion of the International Federation's Secretary General, however, this requirement can be waived, since in a significant number of instances (more than half in 1997), the size and range of operation does not justify a full appeal to donors. Accordingly, the unearmarked or 'seed-corn' element of DREF is crucial to maintaining its primary purpose of delivering urgently-required resources to disaster sites, within hours of catastrophe striking.

In this respect, 1997 has seen a slowing of cash contributions to DREF, compared with the fund's burgeoning response to victims' needs, with just CHF 1.1 million received to date (CHF 2.5 million in 1995 and CHF 3.1 million in 1996). Under the current rules, a balance of CHF one million must be maintained, with the maximum advance of any one operation pegged at CHF 500,000 per annum if an appeal is launched and CHF 300,000 if not.

Overall DREF's balance in 1997 has fallen from CHF 3.5 million at the start of the year to around CHF 2.5 at present. Accordingly, CHF 7.5 million is sought to stabilise this unique and vital fund at CHF ten million, so that it can continue to ensure National Societies, International Federation delegations - and, by extension, the disaster victims themselves - have ready and flexible access to emergency resources, when they are needed most.

**LIST OF 1997 GRANTS**  
(To come)