

# ***KENYA: NAIROBI EXPLOSION***

*12 August 1998*

## ***The Disaster***

More than 200 people are now known to be dead and 5,000 injured, hundreds critically, following Friday's massive explosion in central Nairobi. The American Embassy was severely damaged, while Ufundi House, the six-storey office building adjacent to it was flattened, and is the focus of an ongoing search and rescue operation. Four other buildings in the area were destroyed, and 40 more were damaged. Windows were blown out for many blocks, and glass continues to fall, increasing the likelihood of injury.

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

The Kenya Red Cross Society -- which has been designated lead agency for the operation -- was on the site five minutes after the explosion, and teams of volunteers have been working in shifts of 30 ever since. The International Federation and ICRC both have Regional Delegations in Nairobi, which have provided significant technical, advisory, material and human support to the KRCS operation. This example of co-ordination in the field is being reflected at headquarters level in Geneva, in line with the Seville Agreement.

Operational co-ordination meetings comprising KRCS, the Federation and ICRC are being held twice daily. Government co-ordination meetings, attended by the Heads of Regional Delegations, are also being held daily.

A radio and operations command station was quickly established at the KRCS branch tracing office, a few blocks from the scene. It is staffed 24 hours a day, and a radio field station is run from the site itself. A total of sixteen vehicles (ICRC, Federation and KRCS) are involved in the response operation, ferrying the wounded to hospitals, transporting the dead to morgues and bringing personnel and equipment to the site. Three generators have also been supplied.

A 24-hour Red Cross first aid centre was immediately established. On the day of the blast, 350 persons received treatment and 100 have been treated each day since.

Nine Nairobi hospitals have been assessed to determine needs for replacement medicines and other supplies, and several have already received materials from the Red Cross. As no central information centre has been established on-site visits to medical points will continue in the coming days. The most serious concern at the moment is the lack of specialised medical personnel to conduct eye surgery. Falling glass and other debris has resulted in many ocular injuries.

A Red Cross canteen was established within hours of the blast. Since then 5,000 meals have been provided to workers on site -- volunteers, security personnel, as well as search and rescue teams from abroad. Brooms, dust masks, gloves, torches, batteries, sweaters, stretchers and body bags have been made available, some from the US Embassy and other stocks from the Regional Logistics Centre.

## ***Needs***

The Federation will next week issue a consolidated appeal for emergency social services on behalf of KRCS. The appeal will reflect the needs and support roles of all components of the movement.

As the focus shifts from the rescue effort to the needs of victims' families, the following should be borne in mind: as the blast occurred in the busy city centre, many breadwinners are certain to have been among the dead, and many children will have been orphaned. The impact this will have on family members left behind will be considerable. Emergency social services, such as trauma counselling and emergency assistance, are required immediately.

A full plan of action will be outlined in the Appeal, which will be launched and administered by the International Federation. It is anticipated that the Federation will provide social assistance (food, hygiene), psychological support etc, while the ICRC will support KRCS with medical supplies to hospitals, services to amputees and tracing. Contributions, which may be sent in advance of the appeal launch, and reporting will be administered by the International Federation.

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