Earthquake rocks eastern Turkey

An earthquake of a magnitude close to 6.0 at a depth of 10km occurred early morning on Monday 8 March in a rural area in eastern Turkey (Elazig Province), killing more than 50 people and injuring many more.

The affected area is a sparsely-populated region of Eastern Anatolia where mud-brick houses are common. The earthquake totally or partially destroyed five villages and was followed by some 40 aftershocks. According to the NGO International Blue Crescent in Turkey, 287 buildings totally collapsed and around 700 buildings were damaged. As a result, some 3,500 people needed temporary shelter but most of them left the area to seek accommodation with their relatives in the region.

A rapid response was mounted by the local and central authorities immediately after the earthquake and a number of tents and prefabricated housing units were set up. The Turkish Red Crescent established a Crisis Centre in the disaster area and the Ministry of Health sent 95 ambulances and about 300 health and rescue staff to support the local health structures in the response. Health institutions in the affected area continued to operate normally. Neither the hospitals nor the primary health care facilities experienced damage.

UNICEF and WHO in Turkey, as well as ROMENACA in Cairo, closely monitored the situation, but no international assistance was requested by the Government.

Disastrous Flooding in Kazakhstan

Thirty-five people were confirmed dead, 5,120 people displaced and a total of 10,000 affected by multiple floods and two dam failures in southern Kazakhstan during the second week of March. The flooding was caused by heavy rains and precipitous snow melt.

Several villages and small towns in five districts of Almaty province (Karatal, Aksu, Kerbulak, Koksu and Uighur) as well as the city of Taldykurgan were affected. The Government of Kazakhstan relocated some displaced families to schools and other public facilities in Taldykurgan city and other small towns in Almaty province. Others were moved to relatives and friends in the area.

In Aksu district, the Government set up a tented camp and a field hospital for 1,000 displaced people. The Ministry of Emergency Situations dispatched over 600 search and rescue personnel as well as special transport vehicles and heavy equipment to the area. The national Red Crescent Society dispatched blankets, mattresses, kitchen sets and other non-food items.

The Ministry of Emergency Situations set up a regional operations centre for coordination of the response. The Government has also set up a special commission under the Prime Minister to develop a plan of action to prevent further flooding in vulnerable areas.

Damage to public infrastructure and the economy included the collapse of one major bridge on the Almaty-Ust Kamrnogorsk highway and partial damage to six smaller bridges. In addition, the railroad network in southern Kazakhstan was damaged.

In response, the Government established a pontoon bridge and restored limited auto traffic between Almaty and East Kazakhstan shortly after the flooding.

See also http://www.ocha.kz/
UN to reopen Aid Office in Key City in Yemen’s North

United Nations aid agencies in Yemen have been granted permission to reopen a joint office in the main city of Sa’ada governorate in the north of the country, a move expected to improve humanitarian access to more than 103,000 who have been internally displaced (IDP) as a result of the conflict in that governorate. Some 72,000 of the IDPs are concentrated in Sa’ada town itself.

UN offices were closed in August last year after fighting escalated in the city of Sa’ada.

The Yemeni Government gave the green light following a high-level mission of UN agencies, Government officials and international NGOs to Sa’ada on 24 March. During the mission, the local authorities requested additional assistance to deal with the consequences of displacement and to facilitate the return of IDPs to their homes.

“Our paramount concern at this time is securing unhindered and immediate access to the affected people,” said Aboudou K. Adjibadé, acting UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Yemen. Fighting between armed groups and Government forces has in the past cut off large areas of Sa’ada from humanitarian assistance, but a ceasefire announced on 11 February has paved the way for increased access.

Access is also needed for other areas in Sa’ada and the governorates of Al-Jawf and Amran. 256,000 IDPs have been registered for assistance in Yemen but insecurity and landmines have hampered or delayed distribution of humanitarian aid in many parts of the country.

IDPs have been registered across five conflict-affected governorates: Hajjah, Amran, Sa’ada, Al-Jawf and Sana’a, however funding to the humanitarian operation remains a source of great concern. Of the US$177 million requested for humanitarian aid in Yemen this year, only 20 per cent ($35 million) had been received by the end of March. Several UN agencies have had to resort to internal borrowing to maintain life-saving activities in Yemen.

To mitigate the effects of the relatively poor funding, the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) allocated nearly $7 million to the response in Yemen during March. The highest portion of the grant went to targeted food support requested by WFP ($2 million) followed by non-food items and shelter for internally displaced persons (IDP) in conflict areas requested by UNHCR ($1.2 million). Primary health care services requested by WHO received $1.1 million. Recovery projects to mainly Somali refugees in Yemen received $1 million of the CERF grant.

In March, UNHCR also despatched from its emergency stockpile in Dubai blankets and sleeping mats for 63,000 IDPs Yemen, its ninth shipment from Dubai for this operation since July 2009. See also http://ochaonline.un.org/yemen

Thousands of the displaced in Yemen are children, here in Mazrak IDP camp. Photo: Annasofie Flamand/IRIN

Urgent Life-saving Projects in Yemen highlighted

The Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) in Yemen has identified the most urgent, life-saving projects in the Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan (YHRP) and the key elements that address the immediate needs of vulnerable groups.

The 27 projects have been compiled in a single document with the aim to approach the donor community with a prioritized list of humanitarian response requirements for the next four months (March through June 2010). The projects benefit internally displaced persons (IDP), refugees, and host populations in the sectors of emergency shelter, food, non-food items, health and water and sanitation interventions. Priority is given to IDPs currently accessible to humanitarian agencies and the funding requested in the prioritized list amounts to $33.8 million, representing 18 percent of the YHRP.

The list is posted on www.reliefweb.int
Building Coordination Capacity in Yemen

To boost coordination among humanitarian actors in Yemen, OCHA, in collaboration with the NGO network Humanitarian Forum UK, organized a two-day workshop in Sana’a on 22-23 March. Some 35 humanitarian workers – one third of whom were women – participated.

The participants represented Yemeni community-based organizations and NGOs working in different locations including remote and severely affected areas.

The workshop aimed at increasing national partners’ understanding of key aspects of emergency response such as standard operating procedures in case of emergency; coordinated interventions based on needs; inter-agency rapid needs assessments; and cluster coordination structures. Participants gained insight into international minimum standards and key indicators in humanitarian response, the use of information management in disasters and international funding mechanisms such as Emergency Response Funds.

A list of key recommendations from the workshop was agreed. They include the reactivation of structured NGO coordination and the strengthening of relations between local NGOs and international humanitarian organizations. The aid workers in Yemen also agreed to improve the exchange of information and expertise between international humanitarian organizations and local NGOs.

See also www.humanitarianforum.org

Emergency Food to 200,000 Farmers and Herders in Drought-hit Syria

The World Food Programme (WFP) began distributing emergency food assistance to almost 200,000 people in the drought-affected rural north-east of Syria in the beginning of March. Since 2006, the north-eastern area of the country has been hit by three consecutive droughts and tens of thousands of families have lost their livelihoods.

Some families have reverted to harmful coping mechanisms such as pulling children out of schools and the crisis has triggered migration towards urban centres. According to WFP, up to 80 percent of those affected by the drought live almost entirely on a diet of bread and sugared tea which is not enough to lead a healthy and active life.

The Government of Syria continues its administrative measures to relieve herders and small scale farmers; the Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform has decided to exempt farmers who rent land from the state from paying rent. Also, the Government has allocated 300 million Syrian pounds (US$6.5 million) to empower women in the affected region by providing micro loans.

In support of the drought response, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has provided 450 tons of dates to WFP in March, and Australia has contributed AU$1 million (US$ 900,000).
UN condemns Attacks on Aid Workers in Pakistan

The murder of six staff of the NGO World Vision International in Mansehra District in Pakistan on 10 March was strongly and promptly condemned by the United Nations. "(The attack) is part of a disturbing trend of attacks on aid workers in Pakistan that are preventing thousands of displaced and needy Pakistanis from accessing life-saving assistance, and gravely endangering the lives of humanitarians," read a statement issued by OCHA on 11 March.

John Holmes, the Emergency Relief Coordinator, said that nothing could justify such attacks on those trying to help the people of Pakistan. The UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon also voiced his strong condemnation.

Attacks on aid staff in Pakistan are increasing. Twelve UN staff members have been killed, and 12 others injured in four separate violent incidents since January 2009. In October 2009, WFP's main office in Islamabad was partly destroyed by a suicide bomber, killing five staff members.

Despite the severe risks, the UN and partners have helped the Government of Pakistan assist well over 2 million people who have been displaced by fighting in north-west Pakistan, as well as host communities and people affected by the fighting but who never left their places of origin. The aid community altogether provided some 4.3 million people with food in 2009. This operation is continuing. See also http://pakistan.oneresponse.info

INSARAG aims at establishing international standards for Urban Search and Rescue teams around the world and provides the methodology for international coordination in earthquake response. About INSARAG See http://ochaonline.un.org

Conference for Muslim NGOs

Over 80 NGOs from most parts of the Muslim world attended the third NGO-conference of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in Doha, Qatar on 7 and 8 March 2010. The meeting adopted three sets of recommendations and formed committees and working groups to follow the recommendations through.

Regarding the Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct, the participants stressed the need to present the final version of the codes no later than the next conference, and appreciated the initiative of the World Islamic Call Society in Libya for its willingness to support and host seminars and activities to this end. On Strengthening of Cooperation between Humanitarian Organizations and the OIC, the Conference formed a joint committee to review a proposed form and mechanisms of coordination and cooperation between humanitarian organizations and the OIC to be presented at an extraordinary conference of humanitarian organizations for consideration and adoption.

The Conference also adopted recommendations on Strengthening Cooperation in Gaza-oPt, Darfur-Sudan, Iraq, Yemen, Somalia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Niger and approved the formation of a joint working group for each country.

Finally, the Conference supported all efforts to alleviate the suffering of the families of the victims in Yemen, and called for a redoubling of efforts to meet the basic needs of the affected while urging all sides to assist humanitarian actors in the delivery of aid and to participate in reconstruction efforts. See also www.oic-oci.org

Urban Search and Rescue Team Leaders meet in UAE

Urban Search and Rescue Team Leaders from the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) gathered for their annual meeting in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates on 23 -25 March.

This is the first time in INSARAG's 20-year history that the Team Leader's Meeting takes place in the Gulf region. The Government of the United Arab Emirates, which currently holds the Chair of INSARAG, hosted the meeting together with the Abu Dhabi Police.

INSARAG is a global network of more than 80 countries and disaster response organizations under the United Nations umbrella. The group deals with urban search and rescue following natural disasters such as the recent earthquake in Haiti.
Briefing Kit on the UN in Iraq

The United Nations in Iraq has published a comprehensive briefing kit on UN activities in the country. The package, which is available in both Arabic and English, includes among other documents information on UN entities - including OCHA - working in Iraq and information on the different sections at UNAMI, the UN Mission in Iraq.

Briefing Kit in English:
Briefing Kit in Arabic:
http://www.iauiraq.org/reports/UNAMI/InfoKit2010_AR.pdf

Annual Humanitarian Aid and Development Conference kicks off in Dubai

The seventh Dubai International Humanitarian Aid and Development Conference & Exhibition (DIHAD 2010), organized by INDEX Holding, took place at Dubai World Trade Centre from the 4 to 6 April 2010. The annual event was opened by HRH Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein.

The DIHAD exhibition was preceded by a one-day workshop organized by OCHA ROMENACA for about 45 participants from the region including the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The workshop focused on challenges to delivering humanitarian assistance and addressed topics such as the origins and main principles of the international humanitarian system; media in emergencies; cluster coordination; humanitarian response tools; and the humanitarian impact of climate change. DIHAD participants are mainly NGOs, government representatives and partners from countries in the region and beyond as well as UN officials.

See also www.dihad.org

Upcoming Events:

- **11-12 April** - Workshop on Multi-Sector Planning and Simulation Exercise to Government Representatives in cooperation with IOM/WHO, Yemen
- **13-14 April** - Induction to emergency response for UN Country Team in Uzbekistan
- **18-19 April** - Regional Cluster Meeting of the Regional Directors’ Team in Bahrain
- **18-21 April** - Disaster Management training, Saudi Arabia
- **22 April** - Contingency planning workshop in Tajikistan

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Briefing Kit in English:
Briefing Kit in Arabic:
http://www.iauiraq.org/reports/UNAMI/InfoKit2010_AR.pdf