

WHO joins international effort to help Bam earthquake survivors

WHO has offered to provide technical and material support to the Islamic Republic of Iran, as its Ministry of Health faces the challenge of meeting the urgent health needs of tens of thousands of people affected by the recent earthquake in Bam.

“The profound tragedy of thousands of people killed has caused emotional and psychological trauma for the tens of thousands of people who have survived,” said WHO Director-General, Dr LEE Jong-wook, in his letter of condolences to the Minister of Health and Medical Education of the Islamic Republic of Iran. “It is now imperative to ensure their mental and physical well-being to the fullest extent possible during this fragile period,” he said.

The earthquake, which took place on 26 December, left over 40 000 people dead and around 30 000 injured as well as destroying approximately 20 000 homes, leaving more than 45 000 people homeless. Health concerns faced by the survivors of the earthquake include exposure to cold night temperatures, inadequate access to safe water and sanitation and insufficient injury care.

The physical structures of the main hospitals in Bam, and several urban and rural health clinics, have collapsed. Many medical staff and other health workers have been injured or killed. The Ministry of Health and Medical Education estimated, on a preliminary basis, that the reconstruction of the health system in Bam and its district will require at least US\$ 25 million. WHO is now appealing for US\$ 3.5 million for immediate use by the Iranian authorities to purchase supplies, rehabilitate health facilities and provide vital public and community health services.

Since the earthquake, an estimated US\$ 100 million has been pledged to aid Bam's beleaguered inhabitants. United Nations Under Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs, Jan Egeland, launched an appeal on 8 January for an additional US\$ 70 million — approximately US\$ 30 million for UN efforts

and US\$ 40 million for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

“The priorities are to take care of the survivors, reduce the negative health impacts of the harsh environmental conditions on them, re-establish systems that keep a lookout for communicable diseases and — if they are detected — make sure they are quickly controlled, and re-start health care services ensuring adequate psychological counselling and care to those who survived the tragedy,” said Dr Hussein A. Gezairy, the Regional Director for the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Regional Office, in his condolences message to the President and to the Minister of Health and Medical Education.

WHO has organized a team of experts in emergency health care, epidemiology of diseases, information collection and analysis, environmental health, and health service planning to work with the Iranian Ministry of Health and Medical Education and local officials in the affected area. ■



KEYSTONE

A woman mourns for her loved ones after losing her entire family in the earthquake in Bam, south-east Iran. The earthquake left over 40 000 dead and approximately 30 000 injured.