

# Relief agencies add quake, floods to list: "An incredible emergency year"

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Religious relief agencies, already faced with numerous disasters in the past year, have begun assisting survivors of a massive earthquake in South Asia.

After a 7.6-magnitude earthquake shook Pakistan, India and Afghanistan October 8, Catholic Relief Services staffers already based in the region were able to reach victims within six hours, said Sean Callahan, vice president of overseas operations of the Baltimore-based organization.

"This year has been an incredible emergency year," said Callahan, citing drought and hunger needs on the African continent as well as the more recent hurricanes and flooding that have struck the U.S. Gulf Coast and Central America.

"Since the Sudan situation of about a year ago and then the tsunami . . . this last year has been incredible."

The Catholic charity has begun preparing food and shelter items for families hit by the quake even as it continues a five-year plan for those still recovering from the late-December tsunami that hit another section of Asia.

Meanwhile, other religious relief organizations are addressing old and new needs.

Church World Service is responding with food supplies and shelter kits for survivors in Pakistan, and its medical teams have started providing tetanus shots. Southern Baptist workers have furnished tents and other supplies to homeless families. Both groups also have been involved in relief efforts on the Gulf Coast.

More than a dozen U.S. Muslim groups pledged October 13 to raise \$20 million to aid victims of the earthquake in South Asia that affected the large Muslim population in Pakistan and the Kashmir area. They also said the Muslim Hurricane Relief Task Force, originally formed in response to Hurricane Katrina, would be a permanent coalition responding to other disasters as well.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America allocated an initial \$100,000 to assist relief efforts among earthquake survivors and another \$500,000 to responses to flooding and mudslides in the wake of Hurricane Stan in Central America.

In Central America, Episcopal Relief and Development (ERD) is helping the Anglican Episcopal Church of El Salvador in providing emergency assistance, including food, medicine, shelter and other basic necessities, to more than 40,000 displaced people. ERD is in contact with the dioceses of Guatemala and Honduras and was to send additional aid by midmonth.

Presbyterian Disaster Assistance initially sent \$50,000 to El Salvador to help meet the immediate needs in parts of Central America and southern Mexico that were pummeled by Hurricane Stan. The funds were being channeled through Action by Churches Together International (ACT), a Geneva-based international alliance of churches and relief agencies, of which PDA is a member.

PDA, the relief arm of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), is also committing \$30,000 to Guatemala, pending the arrival of its Latin American representative in the country. -Reuters