



Joint Statement on the Herat earthquakes in Afghanistan

9 November 2023

Background:

On 7 October 2023, a 6.3 magnitude earthquake struck a rural district in Herat Province, followed by a series of strong aftershocks until the morning of 8 October 2023, severely affecting villages in Zinda Jan district. It was one of the deadliest earthquakes to hit Afghanistan in years, where thousands of people have been killed and injured. In the hardest-hit areas, some villages were destroyed, homes reduced to rubble, and medical facilities overwhelmed. On 11 October 2023, a second 6.3 magnitude earthquake struck the same region, with an epicenter 28km north of the city of Herat. On the evening of 12 October 2023, a violent storm hit the earthquake-affected areas, causing injuries, and blowing tents away. A total of 750 people were evacuated to Herat, 256 of them by the ARCS, and temporarily sheltered in schools. People had started returning to their village as soon as on 14 October 2023. Despite a dire situation, all have indicated their will to return to their villages as their livelihood is there (land + livestock) and they have strong affinity to their ancestral land. On 15 October 2023, a third earthquake, this time of 6.4 magnitude struck the same area affecting an additional 30 villages.

Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) response

The ARCS swiftly mobilized response teams, with staff and volunteers from Herat province, amongst the first responders, to provide assistance and relief efforts across the affected areas in Herat. Health teams were deployed to address medical needs, and crucial non-food items including blankets, jerry cans, kitchen sets, and tarpaulins were rapidly released from preparedness stocks and are being distributed to support those impacted by earthquakes. As of 5 November 2023, ARCS had provided assistance to 112,000 people.

The ARCS operational response strategy focuses on both the emergency and recovery phases. Planning for the recovery phase will start in parallel with the on-going delivery of emergency life-saving support. The authorities have allocated eight villages to the ARCS for emergency and recovery support. However, additional villages may be allocated to the ARCS based on identified needs and presence of other actors on the ground. The ARCS will share the name of the villages where the ARCS will focus its emergency response and recovery interventions, as well as confirm whether the ARCS will take a sectorial approach or cover multidisciplinary needs in selected villages.

Movement support

ARCS convened an Emergency Operations Center (EOC) meeting on 8 October 2023 in which all Movement partners in-country participated to ensure technical alignment. Subsequently, a multisectoral assessment teams comprising ARCS, IFRC, and in-country PNS personnel was deployed to Herat on 9 October 2023.

The ICRC, the IFRC and in-country Participating National Societies (PNS) – Danish Red Cross, Norwegian Red Cross, Qatari Red Crescent, and Turkish Red Crescent – are supporting the ARCS, as per area of expertise and available capacities, with technical, financial, and in-kind support. The IFRC network response to Herat earthquakes is also supported by PNS who do not have presence in Afghanistan either through bilateral channels or via the IFRC emergency appeal, which seeks CHF 8.8 million for the Herat earthquakes. Details of those who have channeled support via the IFRC emergency appeal can be found in the donor contribution list (<https://www.ifrc.org/docs/appeals/Active/MDRAF007.pdf>). The Iranian Red Crescent and the Red Cross Society of China have provided bilateral support directly to ARCS. In addition to providing immediate in-kind and financial assistance to the ARCS, the ICRC has also supported Provincial hospitals to enhance their capacity to respond to the emergency, as well as providing in-kind and technical support to the water, forensic and prison authorities.

Movement coordination

A Special Movement Platform Meeting (which served as a Mini-Summit) was convened by the ARCS on 14 October 2023 to create shared understanding of the emergency response and to define how Movement components will work together in support of the ARCS response. With the agreement of ARCS, ICRC and IFRC, the roles of each Movement components are allocated as per the existing Movement Coordination Agreement, in the spirit of Seville 2.0, with ARCS maintaining the central role in coordinating the Movement operations for the earthquake response.

The ARCS will maintain the central role in coordinating the earthquake response operation.

The IFRC will support in Membership Coordination as well as coordinating with established inter-agency mechanisms. The IFRC will also ensure strategic alignment of the membership, including through partner's call which will be jointly organised and attended by all Movement partners.

The ICRC will provide analysis and advice on security developments in the affected areas and recommend to the MPM any changes requiring an adjustment of the security framework as well as support on Safer Access Framework (SAF) at the regional level. The ICRC will engage and coordinate its direct support with relevant authorities at Provincial and National levels.

The EOC activated by the ARCS on 8 October 2023 fulfills the requirements for Operational Coordination among all in-country Movement partners. The EOC will be reinforced with a view to get clear data on the needs, what has been received, what has been used, and coordinate the way forward.

Coordination on technical aspects, include definition of standards applicable to all Movement partners, will be confirmed by technical committees, and submitted to the EOC and when necessary to the MPM.

A sub-national coordination mechanism will be established at the ARCS Regional Office for West, in Herat, with a view to promote a coordinated approach of implementation at field level and facilitate reporting to the ARCS headquarters. The IFRC will establish a field structure, at the ARCS Regional Office for West in Herat, to augment sub-national coordination, while the ICRC will provide support from its sub-delegation in Herat.

Operational response plan of the ARCS and its Movement Partners- Way forward

The ARCS Operational Response strategy for Herat earthquakes focuses on both the **emergency and recovery phases**, and all Movement components may contribute to it. Planning for the recovery phase will start in parallel with the ongoing delivery of emergency life-saving support.

With the search and rescue efforts concluded, the **urgent emergency needs** are for wind-resistant temporary shelters, continuation of health services including mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS). Livelihood support will also be initiated so as not to miss the planting season. Winterization needs are also deemed to be urgent and important as temperatures have started to drop. In addition to winterization items (blankets, boots, clothes, and heating support), suitable solutions that will see people through winter need to be projected.

The **Recovery response** will focus on rebuilding destroyed houses, repair of damaged houses, and restoring livelihoods. Support for water and sanitation facilities is also foreseen to complement the rebuilding efforts.

The ARCS acting President, the ICRC Head of Delegation and the IFRC Head of Delegation **highly recommend flexibility in allocation of financial contributions** for the earthquake response towards the recovery phase and to pursue unearmarked funding to allow flexibility.

Our commitment

In the interests of helping all people in need, Movement partners are committed to strong and efficient collaboration and coordination. We will make all efforts to significantly scale up the humanitarian impact reached through and with the Afghan Red Crescent Society to continue saving lives, improving living conditions of affected people in harder to reach communities and ensure solid accountability towards the affected people.

As the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, we take this opportunity to express our sincere concern for, and solidarity with the affected population. We encourage partners to contribute to the response operation either directly to the Afghan Red Crescent Society through bilateral channels, via the IFRC emergency appeal, or via the ICRC emergency appeal.

We thank all partners for their support,

For the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)	For the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS)	For the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)
Place and Date:	Place and Date:	Place and Date:
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