

Press Release:Japanese Red Cross helps survivors take next steps towards recovery

11/04/08



To ease the plight of earthquake and tsunami survivors, the Japanese Red Cross Society is to equip 70,000 temporary homes with a package of electrical appliances. The assistance – worth an estimated 160 million US dollars and benefiting over 280,000 people – is part of Red Cross efforts to meet the early recovery needs of those affected by the 11 March disaster, when a tsunami swept across 433,000 square kilometres of land.

The first 36 of the government-built prefabricated homes will be occupied in Rikuzentakata, Iwate prefecture from today, 8 April, with the handovers taking place at 2pm at the First Junior High School.

The Japanese Red Cross Society is providing each home with a refrigerator, washing machine, rice cooker, microwave, hot water dispenser and television. The project is being funded by cash contributions from National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies around the world. So far, the equivalent of 34 million US dollars has already been received by the Japanese Red Cross from National Societies overseas.



More than 188,000 people are still displaced by the disaster. Most of them are staying in over 2,200 evacuation centres spread across 17 prefectures, with the vast majority in the three worst-affected prefectures of Iwate, Miyagi and Fukushima. Although people are returning to homes that survived the disaster as electricity and water supplies are restored, the centres continue to house so many people that a number of them are likely to stay open for months to come.

Whilst the Red Cross is making efforts to improve the living conditions in these centres – such as measures to create family spaces and more privacy with partitioning – the prefabricated homes will be a major step towards easing the pressure on evacuation centres, allowing people to return to some semblance of normality.

In the coming weeks, the Japanese Red Cross will continue to place greater emphasis on early recovery. Up until this point, its major focus has been on emergency healthcare and relief distribution.

Hundreds of medical teams have been operating in Red Cross hospitals, in evacuation centre clinics and from mobile units that bring medical care to both smaller and more remote centres, as well as to the general public who have been unable to access such services due to the disruption of state services or impaired access. Lonely and housebound elderly people in particular are being targeted in often life-saving missions.

Some 579 teams have been mobilized from the Japanese Red Cross nationwide network of 92 hospitals. A further 163 are being prepared for further deployment and, in total, approximately 3,000 staff will be involved.

The psychological toll on those who survived the disaster is presenting major challenges and the Japanese Red Cross Society continues to strengthen its efforts to provide psychosocial support. A psychological support centre was established in Ishinomaki Red Cross hospital five days after the disaster to aid grieving families. On 4 April, a second centre was established at the Iwate Red Cross branch in Morioka, from which Red Cross outreach groups are now working. A psychosocial support provider has been assigned to almost all deployed medical teams, and their numbers are now to be increased, particularly in the evacuation centres. In addition, six specialist psychosocial teams, each consisting of six people, have also been deployed.

As part of the Red Cross relief operation, more than 125,000 blankets, 183,000 pieces of clothing, 26,000 emergency relief kits and 11,000 sleeping kits have been handed out to evacuees. Volunteers are also involved in helping to remove mud from those houses left standing.