



Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2001

TIME Europe Home  
Current TIME Europe  
Magazine Archive  
Web Archive  
Web Features  
TIME Trails  
Photo Essays  
Travel  
Digital Europe  
Fast Forward  
Online Polls  
Search TIME Europe

Subscribe to TIME  
Subscriber Services  
About Us

TIME Daily  
TIME Asia  
TIME Canada  
TIME Pacific  
TIME Digital  
Latest CNN News

**FREE  
NEWSLETTER!**  
Sign up now for  
TIME's **WorldWatch**  
email newsletter.  
[ [preview](#) ]



## OTHERNEWS

Check the New  
2000  
FORTUNE 500  
Today!  
[FORTUNE.com](#)

Sivv On Stocks,  
By E-Mail  
[MONEY.com](#)

The 'X-Men'  
Cometh

TIME EUROPE

Tuesday, January 16, 2001

## Unsung Heroes

The IFRC's volunteers are first on the scene when disasters strike

By HELENA BACHMANN Geneva



Yuri Cortez — AFP  
Rescuers retrieve a victim from a landslide caused by the El Salvador earthquake

Within minutes of the January 13 El Salvador earthquake, Red Cross personnel were on the scene, assessing the damage and administering first aid. In the days since the disaster struck, over 1,200 workers from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the world's largest humanitarian organization, have been working around the clock conducting search and rescue operations and helping victims of the quake, which so far has claimed almost 600 lives.

For decades the Geneva-based organization has been helping disaster victims throughout the world. "It's a complex system, but at the end of the day a very efficient one," says Jean Ayoub, director of IFRC's disaster management and coordination.

But what exactly happens when catastrophe strikes? Since the organization has national societies in 176 countries, Red Cross regional personnel are mobilized within minutes. "Our strength is that our people come directly from affected communities and are right there, ready, when a disaster happens," says Marie-Francoise Borel, the organization's spokesperson. "We are there to give first aid, pull survivors from the rubble, evacuate them from danger zones, put them into shelters and give them psychological

## more STORIES

### PHOTO ESSAYS

#### [Life Under Siege](#)

Photographer Jon Levy visits the Jewish settlement in Hebron

#### [The Lockerbie Tragedy](#)

As the trial of two bombing suspects draws to a close, TIME looks back on the bombing and its aftermath

### EUROPE

[Political Pop Star](#): Can Guido Westerwelle once gain make Germany's FDP a force to be reckoned with?

[Bring Back The Burzhuika!](#): Basic services are starting to fail across Russia

### MIDDLE EAST

#### [Ramadan Diary: The Final Feast](#)

Ramadan culminates in Eid up-Fitr, three days of festivities and family-focused celebration

#### [Closer?](#)

President Clinton continues to push for a Middle East peace plan, but the Israelis and Palestinians are finding it tough to agree

### AFRICA

#### [The Rise of a Gentle Giant](#)

Ghana welcomes its

help." After an initial assessment by Red Cross workers, further aid is sent in coordination with the local government and other humanitarian and relief organizations.

Ayoub says \$100,000 from the IFRC's disaster response and emergency fund was sent to El Salvador immediately after the earthquake. The organization has issued an initial appeal for \$1 million more to be supplied by private, public and corporate donors. This is standard procedure, Ayoub says, although the organization is urging donors to support pre-financing for sudden emergencies.

"In a disaster such as this, with high visibility and high impact, the response to our appeal is usually total. But with less visible disasters, it's often a struggle to raise adequate funds." The IFRC's activities are also funded by membership fees, national societies and governments, as well as money donated in response to the organization's annual appeals. This year it is hoping to raise approximately \$180 million for 81 humanitarian programs worldwide.

The 82-year-old organization, which is known as Red Crescent in Islamic countries, employs 300,000 staffers but relies heavily on 100 million volunteers to carry out missions around the globe. Volunteers are recruited and trained by national societies. Training may include first aid, disaster preparedness and logistics, rescue techniques, psychological support and, in some countries, home-care program for AIDS sufferers and their families. "Volunteers are our lifeline and without them we couldn't function," she says.

IFRC secretary general Didier Cherpitel calls Red Cross volunteers "unsung heroes. They regularly put their lives at risk. They are there when the disaster strikes and continue their work long after the media spotlight has moved elsewhere."

For more information about the IFRC, visit [www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org).

[TIME Europe home](#)

[More stories and related links](#)

E-mail us at [mail@timeatlantic.com](mailto:mail@timeatlantic.com)

new President in a peaceful, democratic transfer of power

### [The Fallen Cotton Tree Is Taller than the Grass](#)

TIME talks with Sierra Leonean filmmaker Sorious Samura

## TECHNOLOGY

### [The Love Gun](#)

A digital matchmaker explores new frontiers in flirting

### [The Digital DJ](#)

An Internet and music industry veteran has a plan for online song distribution

## ARTS

### [Liberté, Égalité, Samia](#)

A new film examines a French beurette's struggle for greater freedom and an identity of her own

### [The Weak in Review](#)

A sadistic new game show combines 'Big Brother' with 'Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?' into a surprise UK hit

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

E-mail us at [mail@timeatlantic.com](mailto:mail@timeatlantic.com)