



Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance

DISASTER CASE REPORT

Agency for
International
Development

Washington D.C.
20523

ARGENTINA - Earthquake

Date: January 26, 1985

Location: Mendoza Province

No. Dead: Six

No. Affected: 238 injured, 45,000 displaced

Damage: 11,800 houses destroyed beyond repair

The Disaster

An earthquake measuring 5.9 on the Richter scale caused extensive damage to the city of Mendoza and its suburbs on January 26. Electricity, gas, water, and telephone services were temporarily disrupted. The most seriously affected areas were the densely populated and poorer suburbs, where adobe construction was prevalent, while modern seismic-resistant structures withstood the shocks.

Provincial officials estimated that approximately 45,000 people were made homeless by the quake. Of these, 33,000 were housed in schools, tents, and other shelters or sought refuge with friends or relatives (Government of Argentina estimated as many as 30,000 "self-evacuated" to the homes of friends and relatives). The most serious problem was providing temporary shelter and sanitary facilities for the remaining 10,000 to 15,000 people, most of whom insisted on staying at the site of their destroyed homes for fear of losing their possessions or the right to use their land. In these instances, government strategy was to provide tents or other temporary shelter and assist with rebuilding.

Action Taken by the Government of Argentina (GOA) and Local Voluntary Agencies

The GOA immediately provided temporary shelter in schools and military quarters for 3,300 of the homeless. For the approximately 10,000 people

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left without shelter, local officials of Mendoza concluded there were sufficient supplies of food and medicine, but requested U.S. assistance in procuring tents, portable toilets, disinfectants, blankets, and clothing.

The city and province of Mendoza was assisted in its relief efforts by the Argentine National Civil Defense, the Argentine Red Cross, the Salvation Army, and Caritas. The Red Cross distributed food, clothing, blankets, medicine, sanitary facilities, and plastic sheeting (which had been provided by the U.S. in response to a flood disaster in the north-eastern provinces in 1983); the Salvation Army provided food and clothing and sent a team to assist local authorities with disaster recovery; and Caritas solicited donations of food, blankets, and clothing. The Social Action Department of the provincial government coordinated these operations and arranged all necessary clearances for a U.S. airlift into Mendoza, providing ground transport to move U.S. supplied tents to the disaster area and distributing them to disaster victims. Argentine Air Force personnel subsequently helped with off-loading at the airport and distribution.

The provincial government cleared land in 12 affected areas to prepare for the erection of approximately 40 U.S.-donated tents at each site. These camp sites were planned to attract people away from their damaged homes so that the structures could be demolished. In addition, the camps provided sanitary facilities.

Following the arrival of the U.S. tents and others provided by the GOA, Mendoza Emergency Committee officials reported that their temporary shelter needs had been met. They also had sufficient relief supplies of food, blankets, and medical supplies, but they requested help in providing sanitary facilities and rain gear.

A reconstruction committee was created which, in a meeting with Mendoza Governor Santiago Felipe Llaver, discussed provision of emergency housing. Province officials hoped to implement a program before winter began. President Alfonsin promised to ensure special lines of credit for repair of damaged homes and reconstruction. The Minister of Education delivered 47 million pesos (U.S. \$150,000) to Mendoza Province to repair ten damaged schools.

Additional help for the earthquake victims arrived from diverse sources. Workers belonging to the Argentine General Confederation of Labor donated one hour's wages to help homeless families; other donations included 9.6 tons of food, clothing, medicine, and blankets delivered in ten shipments free of charge by the Argentine airline, Austral. Hundreds of volunteers helped distribute relief materials. Other contributions from Argentinian government and private organizations amounted to approximately \$627,000.

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Assistance Provided by the United States Government

On January 31, the Deputy Chief of Mission determined that the disaster was of sufficient magnitude to warrant U.S. Government assistance. The Mission Disaster Relief Officer (MDRO) and the Consular Officer visited the disaster zone the next day to determine how the disaster assistance authority could best be used and whether additional funds would be necessary. They identified immediate temporary shelter as the most urgent need. Based on their recommendations, the U.S. Mission requested that tents be airlifted directly from the OFDA Stockpile in Panama to the Mendoza Airport.

Subsequently, on February 3, the DOD, with manpower and transportation provided by the U.S. Army, airlifted 424 tents and flies from the stockpile in Panama. (The cost of this assistance was \$63,705.) The tents, which could accommodate approximately 4,000 people, were unloaded by the Argentine Air Force and transported to Mendoza stadium for distribution to the disaster zone. An encampment was set up in an open field in the municipality of Godoy Cruz, where 117 of the tents housing 107 families were erected. Additional tents were set up in small groups, scattered in several locations, or temporarily stored until site work was completed for larger encampments.

The MDRO participated in Mendoza Emergency Committee meetings with provincial and city officials and representatives from the local and International Red Cross. The U.S. Ambassador, accompanied by the Economic Counselor and the Commercial Attache, visited Mendoza February 6 and 7 to survey the earthquake damage and to discuss the U.S. relief effort with local officials. While there, he presented a check for \$10,000 (2.6 million pesos) to the Emergency Committee to help resolve the sanitation problem. U.S. Mission officials also solicited support from the American community and business associations in Mendoza and Buenos Aires.

TOTAL \$73.605

Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies and Other Private Groups

The American Chamber of Commerce - issued a call for U.S. businesses to assist in the disaster relief effort.

The American Society of the River Plate - donated \$2,000 to the Mendoza Emergency Committee to be used to purchase rain gear and other supplies for disaster victims.

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Citಿಸervice - donated one ton of powdered milk and three tons of sugar valued at \$5,000 to the local Red Cross.

Union Oil - contributed \$2,000 to the Mendoza Emergency Committee.

TOTAL \$9,000

Assistance Provided by the International Community

International Organizations

LRCS - a representative met with the Mendoza Emergency Committee and reported on the sanitation situation.

WHO - with Mendoza Province engineers, prepared a report assessing sanitation problems in the earthquake zone, including the need for sanitary services, trash collection, and control of disease and insect vectors. WHO donated \$9,231.

Governments

Chile - airlifted 5 MT of emergency relief supplies to Mendoza.

France - presented \$10,000 to Mendoza Governor Llaver for the earthquake victims; delivered 350 prefab houses for the reconstruction effort, value unknown.

Germany, Fed. Rep. - gave a donation to the victims, value unknown.

Voluntary Agencies

China, People's Rep., Red Cross - donated \$50,000 to the Emergency Committee.

TOTAL \$69,231