



Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance

DISASTER CASE REPORT

Agency for
International
Development

Washington D.C.
20523

WESTERN SAHARA - Displaced Persons

Data

Date: Late 1975 through mid-1976 (FY 76)

Location: Western Sahara, southern Morocco, and western Algeria near the town of Tindouf

No. Dead: No record

No. Affected: 70,000

The Disaster

According to an agreement reached in Madrid on November 14, 1975, Spain relinquished control of Spanish Sahara in late February 1976 to a joint administration by Morocco and Mauritania. This partition of land, subsequently to be called Western Sahara, resulted in tens of thousands of refugees and displaced persons. The situation was further complicated by guerrilla activity of Algerian-supported nationalists, the Polisario, who did not recognize the Madrid accord. As of February 1976, approximately 20,000 persons were camped in northeast Western Sahara, a region controlled by the Polisario; another 20,000 had crossed the border into Algeria where they were camped near the town of Tindouf. In addition, 30,000 Moroccans living in Algeria were expelled and forced to live under harsh conditions in Morocco. There were also cases of need along the Western Sahara - Mauritania border. In March 1976 all camps for displaced persons in northeastern Western Sahara were evacuated and those people living there were moved to Algeria, raising the number of refugees in Algeria from 20,000 to 40,000.

Action Taken by the Government of Algeria (GOA)

The Algerian Red Crescent coordinated relief activities for refugees within Algeria. The GOA provided some food and shelter; however funds for the main relief effort came from an appeal sponsored jointly by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the League of Red Cross Societies (LORCS). \$7.5 million was made available to purchase tents, blankets, clothing, medicaments, and food. The airline, Air Algerie, and the shipping company, La Compagnie Nationale Algerienne de Navigation, provided free transportation of all relief supplies destined for refugees in Algeria.

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Action Taken by the Government of Mauritania (GOM)

Mauritania viewed Western Saharan inhabitants as Mauritanian citizens rather than refugees and sought to treat the issue of displaced persons as an internal affair. Assistance for these people was coordinated by the Mauritanian Red Cross. Funds for food - rice, flour, corn, butter, and oil were provided by ICRC.

Action Taken by the Government of Morocco (GOM)

Relief activity was coordinated jointly by the Moroccan Red Crescent and the Government of Morocco. Refugee camps, established in southern Morocco, provided temporary shelter, food, and medical care. Funds to support the relief effort were made available through ICRC and LORCS.

Assistance Provided by the United States Government (USG)

A grant of \$100,000 was given to ICRC for emergency supplies to be delivered and distributed under ICRC auspices.....\$100,000

TOTAL \$100,000

Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies *

Catholic Relief Services and Lutheran World Federation, which have on-going involvement in Morocco and Algeria, were active in the relief effort. The value of their assistance is unknown.

Assistance Provided by the International Community *

ICRC and LORCS issued two appeals for assistance from the international community. Approximately \$7.5 million was made available for the relief effort in Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania. Countries (either governments or Red Cross) that contributed cash or in kind aid included Great Britain, New Zealand, Norway, Canada, Sweden, and Spain.

The UN High Commissioner on Refugees provided \$500,000 for emergency relief for refugees in Algeria.

TOTAL \$8,000,000

* Please note: the figure for total international assistance is an approximation. In many cases the cash value of in kind aid is unavailable.