



CAUCASUS ARMENIA – UNIVERSITY COOPERATION PROGRAM PROMOTING PEACE IN “COMPLEX” HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

EARTHQUAKE IN ARMENIA AND FIRST HUMANITARIAN AID PROGRAM

VIDEO: <https://youtu.be/TFqunQtTlIE>



COLLAPSE OF THE SOVIET UNION - HUMANITARIAN AID ENERGY-HEATH PROGRAM



Aftermath of the Armenian earthquake: from emergency aid to cooperation for development

SIR—In December 1988 over 60 000 people died as a consequence of the Armenian earthquake. Only a few kilometres from its epicentre, Spitak was completely destroyed and lost about half its population: more than 13 000 people were killed and some 5000 were injured.

Italy's Institute for University Cooperation, which has been involved in cooperative development programmes and disaster relief in various countries, organized an emergency aid programme for Spitak immediately after the earthquake and envisaged the possibility of subsequent cooperation for development. Clearly, any programme organized in response to a request for assistance following a natural calamity should start at once and should be capable of adapting to changing circumstances. The first important requirement in Armenia was to stand in for the local health organization, which was virtually paralysed by the earthquake. The situation of children was particularly serious, many having lost one or both parents, and the living conditions of the surviving population were extremely precarious.

The Institute therefore concentrated on providing health care for mothers and children at this stage. In conjunction with the European Community, the Institute created a health care centre for them in Spitak. It has been operating with the help of volunteer health workers from the Institute and from universities and specialist centres in EEC countries. The health care programme is mainly directed towards the inhabitants of nearby Villaggio Italia, a gift of the Italian government consisting of 200 prefabricated homes for about 1500 people, of whom 500 are children under the age of 13 years.

In conjunction with local medical staff an enquiry was conducted into the state of sanitary and health conditions in the region. This revealed that medical treatment would have to be accompanied by other services, and that the

population would require education in matters of hygiene, diet, breast-feeding, and prenatal health. It was also clear that traumatized children would require psychological and physical treatment.

The Institute's staff aimed both to perform their immediate tasks and to lay foundations for the rapid transfer of the management of the centre to local operators. Great care was taken to remotivate local staff, and those with the personal and professional skills to run the centre were singled out. In terms of equipment and functionality, the centre constituted a new stage in the development of the local health organization.

During the emergency phase the Institute had to fill gaps caused by the disaster and support the local operators as they faced innumerable and diverse problems. Even at this delicate stage the foundations were being laid for a programme of cooperation aimed at the development of the whole area. In this connection, the detailed knowledge of the local situation which was acquired and the friendly relations that developed among the staff working together during the reconstruction phase were extremely useful.

Once the emergency period was over, the Institute was asked by the Ministry of Health to continue its activity in the Spitak region and to sign a cooperation agreement. In this new phase the primary objective was to train Armenian staff in the skills necessary to manage the centre and improve the quality of the health care available to mothers and children in the region. Experts were sent from the Bambino Gesù Children's Hospital and the Sacred Heart Catholic University, both in Rome, and from the University of l'Aquila.

Local doctors and nurses were given grants enabling them to participate in retraining programmes in Italy, organized by the Institute. In July 1990, nineteen months after the earthquake, the first group of Armenian experts took over the management of the centre. The local health authorities stated that the new health care centre in Spitak was a point of reference for the whole region and took steps to increase the numbers of medical staff and nurses working in it.

Water pollution was also tackled by the programme. The Institute initiated a scheme of water treatment in the region by installing a water conditioner capable of satisfying the needs of 2500 people.

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By Prof. Massimo Maria Caneva MD PhD President AESI October 2020

The conflict situation in the **Caucasus between Armenia and Azerbaijan** arises from afar. When in 1988/89 we intervened for humanitarian aid following the catastrophe of the earthquake, the situation was already complex. To a natural catastrophe were added the collapse of the Soviet Union and conflicts in the crisis zone on the borders not only with Azerbaijan but also with tensions with Turkey. We worked a lot with the Armenian authorities to rebuild the destroyed town of Spitak, the epicenter of the earthquake, giving them a roof with the Italian Village built by the Italian Civil Protection. Personally, I was in charge of coordinating the humanitarian aid part for the ICU Center for Mothers and Children. Let us not forget this Region of the world and the drama that the civilian population suffers from these forgotten conflicts. University cooperation can go a long way!

The training of the new generations of university students must have a theoretical but also a practical approach to crisis situations, not receive information provided only by the media so as to replace professors with journalists who have another type of approach to the issues of humanitarian emergencies. The academicians and the university student must analyze the causes but at the same time participate in the consequences of the crises with analysis and action through university cooperation programs for peace. It is my hope today that a war is being fought in the Caucasus which has already caused so many victims. The earthquake was for me an opportunity for help and knowledge of their suffering.