

# Europe

DISASTER

Turkey Landslides



**Date**

June 23, 1988

**Location**

The village of Catak, in Trabzon Province, about 300 km. north-east of Ankara and just south of the Black Sea port of Trabzon

**No. Dead**

64 (63 verified; 1 missing, presumed dead)

**No. Affected**

305: 185 homeless (25 families), 130 injured

**Damage**

Several public buildings, houses and businesses were damaged or destroyed, including 34 houses, 13 shops and the local elementary school. Many village houses were flooded, the major highway through Catak was cut, and water, electricity and telephone services were cut.

**The Disaster**

At 8:00 a.m. on June 23, after several days of rain, half a million tons of rock and mud slid down a mountain into the village of Catak, covering an area 60 meters wide by 80 meters long. The landslide destroyed restaurants, buses, cars, and a school, and cut a section of the highway between Erzurum and Trabzon, a Black Sea port city 29 km. north of Catak. Many houses were damaged, with roofs particularly hard hit. Because it was breakfast time and bus passengers had been stranded in Catak by an earlier, smaller landslide, the cafes were packed, and at first, it was feared that the death toll would climb as high as 300. The continuing rain hampered relief work and caused more small landslides. The Black Sea area is prone to landslides, possibly due to deforestation, but this was Turkey's biggest landslide in years.

Rescue operations were halted at 8:00 p.m. on June 23 and at noon the next day because the excavations were inducing more landslides. The mud was so soft that rescue dogs (sent by West Germany) often had trouble walking. In addition, the extreme depth at which the victims were buried severely limited the ability of the dogs to locate bodies. Rescue work resumed more successfully early in the morning of June 25. Turkish authorities believed that 40 people remained buried; one body had been recovered. An elementary school and several other buildings were still covered by mud. The landslide had also caused several streams to change course, flooding village houses. On July 6, the total number of bodies recovered came to 61, most from the coffeehouse, and authorities did not expect the toll to go much higher. The highway opened several days later. The major landslide area, however, had to be bypassed by a service road until the mountain stabilized, reducing the risks of further landslides.

Twenty-five families (185 people) were rendered homeless by the devastating slide, but authorities estimated that an additional 175 families would have to be relocated to safer areas. Later in July, local authorities set off a controlled explosion attempting to dislodge any remaining loose rock or

mud. When no slides resulted, Turkish authorities decided not to relocate families whose houses had not been destroyed.

**Action Taken by the Government of Turkey (GOT) and Non-Governmental Organizations**

The GOT's General Directorate for Disasters of the Ministry of Public Works directed and carried out relief and rescue operations. The Turkish government brought in earth-moving equipment for rescue and excavation, moved families endangered by landslides, established centralized phone numbers to report missing persons, and identified needs (search-and-rescue dogs) to be provided by other donors. The Land Registry and Survey Office helped pinpoint the exact location of buildings buried in the debris in order to excavate bodies, some of which were buried in 30 meters of mud and debris. A GOT disaster relief fund for the Catak landslide was set up and administered by the Ministry of Public Works.

The Turkish Red Crescent Society provided assistance to those displaced by the landslides and sent a 15-person team to the disaster site immediately. The Red Crescent set up mobile kitchens and distributed food, tents, blankets, clothing, and shrouds. The total value of both in-kind and cash assistance provided by the Red Crescent was approximately \$61,153 (86 568,000 Turkish lira). The society also supported mitigation efforts to deal with future landslides.

**Assistance Provided by the U.S. Government**

The unusual severity of the landslide and the fear of a death toll in the hundreds caused nationwide and international concern (several German tourists were among the victims). The GOT requested technical assistance in rescue and extrication techniques and welcomed donations for Red Crescent relief activities. Therefore, U.S. Charge d'Affaires, ad interim, William F. Rope on behalf of U.S. Ambassador Strausz-Hupe declared the landslide to be a disaster on June 24.

The Ambassador presented a check for \$25,000 to the Turkish Red Crescent Society on July 8 to aid the victims of the landslide. This amount represented almost 41% of the Red Crescent effort.

**TOTAL            \$25,000**

**Assistance Provided by U.S. Voluntary Agencies**

None reported

**Assistance Provided by the International Community**

Germany, Fed. Rep. - sent 16 search-and-rescue dogs and handlers for the first week after the disaster and provided a medical team.

Germany, Fed. Rep., Red Cross - donated \$14,476 to the Turkish Red Crescent.

United Kingdom - provided 2 geologists

**TOTAL            \$14,476**