

## SOME SOCIAL ASPECTS OF EARTHQUAKE DISASTER

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### INTRODUCTION

Earthquake is a very peculiar type of disaster. It has, also a most terrifying character against which the human being has the feeling of a high degree of weakness and unsafety. Moreover, the earthquake is an unavoidable natural phenomena. Inondation and fire could be made avoidable to some extent. But tectonic activities represent a tremendous violence of nature.

Human societies may stay away from this phenomena by not settling in the earthquake regions. But, settlements exist and will exist in such regions. Therefore, the handling of the situation consists of two points:

- 1- Try to minimize earthquake hazard by developing the concept of earthquake resistant structures and applying this concept in the field
- 2- To take the pre-measures in order to make the hazarded region return to normal daily life and to socio-economical activities, in the shortest period.

These two groups of measures should be the main national preoccupations of the societies living on the earthquake territories. In our day, to be organised against disaster phenomena is one of the duties that correspond to the "concept of social state".

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## SOCIAL DISORDER CREATED BY EARTHQUAKE

Unusual human problems are the first product of a heavy earthquake. Injured or killed human beings, damaged or ruined dwellings create, altogether, a chaotic social scenery.

An earthquake brings, indeed, a high climbing of the existing but hidden, inner disorder of a society to the national and international attention. Panic can be qualified as a part of individual human reactions. But, the chaos is a higher order situation derived from social disorganisation.

The more problematic is your social organization, the higher is the effect of the chaos. In this extent, the application of disaster measures after earthquake shows also, different levels of efficiency for rather badly organised, socially problematic countries and well structured societies

But, whatever the social structure of a country is, the transition from disorder and full panic to normal life has three steps:

### 1- Period of first three days following the disaster:

This is a period of total physical and moral collapse. The press and TV-radio news generally exaggerates the dimension of the disaster and the size of damages. The intervention of regional or central authorities starts within a few hours following the disaster. But, the full control of the situation may take a time varying from 12 hours to 24 hours depending on the climatic conditions and the location of the quaked area. During the 1971 San Fernando earthquake the location of the disaster area being situated in the neighbourhood of active social and administrative centers, the control has been established very quickly and that had been considered as an excellent performance by earthquake literature.

But, in Turkey, in Iran, in India, the period of controlling the situation in full can be longer and it happened such, in some of the past disasters.

The second and third days are marked by the visits of state authorities and the official announcements about the real sizes of the disaster which are generally less terrifying than the first sensational press news.

During this first three days period, state central organizations are not yet in a higher degree of efficiency. Local authorities, voluntary groups and some individuals would supply the main support.

2- Period of Planning to Return to Normal Daily Life (Week following the First Three Days):

Main preoccupations during the immediately-after-quake period are obviously, transportation of injured people, first aid activities, distribution of foods, funerals and insuring the regular work of hospitals and local power plant. But, around a week after disaster, the lamentation is replaced by a doubtful feeling relative to organising the future life. The hospital, power plant and quickly repaired service roads only are not any more sufficient to cover all social and physical necessities of the disastered locality. State central organizations supported by local authorities, should start to realize, there, a real efficient activity which aims the return of daily life.

The planning should base on several technical points: Repairing damaged structures and energy supply network, resettling some of the heavily hazarded villages, construction of new roads, replacing some mechanical equipment in order to recycle industrial production etc. But the basic idea behind should be related to the concept of social balance. That does not simply mean the creation of funds and credits at financial level. But, technical and economical planning should focus on a whole new vision and the disastered population should be conscient of this social perspective as quickly as possible, at most, within eight-ten days following the earthquake.

If the people are not made equipped with the feeling of struggle within these days, then even the best projects are bound to fail.

As for the resettling some villages or towns, it arises the discussion about the definite or temporary resettling. In most cases, the transitory and temporary resettlements are turned out to be almost definite resettlements.

### 3- Hazard Repairing Period:

No duration can be estimated for this period. Repairing the hazard of a disaster both physically and psychologically is rather a long procedure.

It is especially desirable to produce a well coordinated field engineering activity and to apply a social animation program, together. This objective can be reached in a highly satisfactory way in the societies having the tradition of coordination. But, there are also countries where coordination is not significant social character, the work of hazard effect elimination can be less productive.

In those countries, decisions concerning the alternatives of definite or temporary resettling are taken less easily, too. Political pressures are more influential and can push sometimes the technical findings to second plan.

### COMMENTS

Earthquake disaster is a nude and very cruel reality to which man and society have to face.

Central and local authorities should be sufficiently equipped to cover the particular tasks relative this phenomena. But, the disastred population itself is the fondemental source of recovery. The state approach should be focused, then, especially on the creation of a special feeling of overcoming.

The type of administrative organisation is not very important, in that respect. But, the concept and the philosophy leading to this organisation are the main elements. All should be ordered in view of regaining man.

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