

Speeches and Articles: Environment

A speech by HRH The Prince of Wales at a Red Cross seminar on the Bam Earthquake, Iran, held at St. James's Palace State Apartments, London, Friday 6th February, 2004

Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen – as President of the British Red Cross I am delighted to join you here today, and, on your behalf, to thank all those who have worked so hard at such short notice to organise today's briefing. I know that it has been a huge team effort, and I think I speak for all of you when I say that this is clearly something at which the Red Cross excels.

I have been deeply moved by the presentation and heartrending stories I have heard today. It has, to be frank, been a painful and emotionally challenging presentation. But it makes me particularly proud to be part of a global humanitarian movement that responded with such speed and professionalism to the devastation wrought upon the people of Bam. As we have heard, thanks to the prompt welcome of the Iranian Government – and I am pleased to be able to pay tribute to the Iranian Ambassador personally for this - the British Red Cross was able to offer very speedy practical and technical assistance to the Iranian Red Crescent on the ground. It was they, through people like Mustapha here with us this morning, who co-ordinated the unimaginable effort to help pull people from the rubble and begin to help them rebuild their totally shattered lives.

For me, one of the most remarkable aspects of this story is the effectiveness with which the Iranian Red Crescent was able to mobilise the astonishing number - two million – of its volunteers. If ever there was a tribute to the value and importance of the voluntary sector – that great unsung coagulant of civil society – it is this.

That so many lives were lost, and so many others, quite literally, turned upside down by this disaster is made all the more difficult to bear because a site of such historic, cultural and architectural significance has been irrevocably scarred. The rupture of a geological fault line sent shockwaves that reverberate beyond the short attention span of the world's media in the immediate aftermath of that dreadful event. I take considerable encouragement from what Archie Walls has said about the possibilities of reconstruction and I share his enthusiasm for mud brick, but we must all accept that this will be a long, painful journey, requiring help from all over the world to achieve the rebuilding of peoples



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homes the sympathetic restoration of the historic citadel, and the intricate aqueduct system of which of course peoples livelihoods depend.

The reconstruction of Bam will take many years. A key to the success of this will, I think, be the support and strength which organisations like the Red Cross give to communities over time. This isn't just about helping after disasters like this one, but is also about strengthening society to prepare for them. It is a long-term, consolidating process – building on goodwill, selflessness, and willingness to help; building in professionalism and expertise; and sometimes – as we've seen in today's presentation – adding astonishing courage and heroism. It is, to me, perhaps one of the most uplifting things you can see in a society – its capacity to undertake such great ventures through teamwork, professionalism, and selflessness.

But none of this would be possible without the generosity of those who – like the Red Cross volunteers in the UK, and the amazing two million Red Crescent volunteers in Iran – give of their time and resources freely. The generosity, too, of the Red Cross and Red Crescent professionals, who – as we've just seen – give more than their job demands, and strive consistently for ever-higher standards of professional rigour. And, above all, Ladies and Gentlemen, the generosity of those who, like you yourselves, give so much, and so willingly, to sustain this great organisation. But, I can only thank you for what it is worth for all that you have done to help the Red Cross and Red Crescent, and to encourage you if I may to urge others to help sustain that crucial support henceforth.s

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