



Communications for life

Télécoms sans Frontières

EARTHQUAKE IN MOROCCO - Al Hoceima
February, 24th - March, 1st 2004



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Mission Morocco

February, 24th - March, 1st 2004

Following an earthquake which struck the Mediterranean Coast of Morocco during the night of Monday 23rd to Tuesday 24th of February 2004, Télécoms sans Frontières is there from February, 25th in order to put at the rescue teams' disposal its telecoms equipment and its technicians.



A traumatised population in a wounded province

This violent earthquake, registered 6.3 on the Richter scale, struck the province of Al Hoceima. It occurred at 2.30 a.m. (GMT), waking up the population and destroying more than 2 500 homes. The number of victims is at first not very alarming but the death toll increasing very fast, there are already several hundreds of dead and wounded on the same day at noon. The two most affected villages are Im Zourem and Aït Kamra, located a few kilometres South and Southwest of Al Hoceima.



The earthquake left more than 15 000 people homeless and waves of panic increased with the many after-shocks. Most of the inhabitants would not want to live in their home unless it is still standing. They are traumatised and would rather camp along the roads or on public places.

When TSF arrived on the scene of the disaster, the situation was confused. The team had joined forces to intervene with the rescue organisations and with the disaster victims and to do so, it was equipped with satellite phone lines, high speed data transmitters and a system of Visio conference / Visio emergency.

TSF gave a telecoms support to...

- ***The NGOs***

When it arrived, TSF noticed that many rescue organisations from all over Europe had joined forces. But working with no means of communications, they were coming up against a lack of information and were also cut off from their headquarters. That was a great disadvantage to the good coordination of the rescue efforts. Immediately, TSF gave them the priority and set up among them at the airport of Al Hoceima. There, it opened its first data transmission centre within the United Nations Coordination Office.

To establish the Internet connection, TSF used its satellite equipment: the terminal would supply a 115 Kbps connection. Thanks to the Wi-Fi cards installed into each PC, every one of them was connected by radio waves to the router distributing the Internet connection. TSF made 3 PCs available to the NGOs but those organisations could also use their own PC and connect it to the Internet by a cable network plugged to the router or by the Wi-Fi system.



Therefore, the different NGOs and the Security and Civil Protection Corps were able to send their conclusions and reports to their headquarters. The presence of TSF was particularly essential for the transfer of the UNDAC's conclusions (United Nations Disaster Assessment and

Coordination) after it carried out several assessments of the situation. Indeed, it is very important for the UN headquarters in Geneva to have a precise view of the situation so that they can organise properly the phase of rehabilitation according to the real needs of the population (infrastructures, health facilities, food, etc.).

Likewise, when some of the organisations had their own telecoms equipment, some of them came to the Centre to benefit from the technical assistance of the TSF technicians.

Beyond the telecoms assistance, the centre was also a site for the NGOs to meet and exchange information for a better evaluation of the priority areas of intervention.

Moreover, Télécoms sans Frontières opened a second data centre within the Red Cross Operational Centre set up in Im Zourem, one of the two most affected villages. The TSF technicians trained the Moroccan Red Crescent staff so that it was able to maintain the good functioning of the centre. Thus TSF brought its logistic support to the activities carried out by the Moroccan Red Crescent and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.



- *The Moroccan population*

The needs of the population in telecommunications were not clearly defined when the TSF team arrived in Al Hoceima. There was no major problem in this coastal city but the neighbouring isolated communities seemed to be cut off from the rest of the country and moreover not very accessible. It was important to know whether the populations of those villages had been able to get in touch with their relatives since the earthquake in order to inform them and to ask them for help when necessary.



Therefore TSF achieved an evaluation of the needs in telecommunications in these isolated communities, notably in the Tammasint surroundings. After a tour in several of them, it appeared that the GSM network was available even in those remote areas and most of the people had already been in contact with their family in Morocco or abroad.

Nevertheless, given the price of this mean of communication, the poor populations often cannot afford to have a mobile phone and all of them had not yet had the opportunity to contact personally members of their family. Then, the technicians of TSF opened satellite phone lines in some of the communities so that the people could make phone calls.

Conclusion

On February 28th, the team considered - and so did the other organisations- that the emergency phase was over and decided to leave Morocco.

Nevertheless, Télécoms sans Frontières left some of its satellite equipment to the Moroccan Red Crescent in order not to let the organisation without any mean of telecommunications. Therefore, TSF's mission in Morocco really ended on March, 1st.

On March, 4th 2004, 629 people had died, 926 people were known to have been injured and 2540 houses were down in the Province of Al Hoceima.