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FEBRUARY 6 FIELD OBSERVATION REPORT ON EARTHQUAKES

NEGLECT AND VIOLATIONS AGAINST WOMEN
RECOMMENDATIONS

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Affected Provinces and General Situation of the Earthquake

Earthquakes with magnitudes of 7.7 and 7.6 centered in Kahramanmaraş on February 6, 2023, were felt not only in Kahramanmaraş but also in Adana, Adıyaman, Diyarbakır, Elazığ, Hatay, Gaziantep, Kilis, Malatya, Osmaniye, and Şanlıurfa, causing loss of tens of thousands people and many more getting injured. According to official figures, as of March 13, 2023, 48,448 people have lost their lives, thousands have been injured, and millions have been displaced. The earthquakes have caused a great deal of destruction not only in Turkey but also in Syria.

In our country, which is prone to earthquakes, the lack of coordination among relevant units in the early days of the earthquake, which is vital in earthquake and disaster management, has caused the destructive effects of the earthquake to increase. The failure to send sufficient search and rescue teams, heavy machinery, equipment, and relief materials to the earthquake-stricken areas has increased the loss of life and prevented earthquake victims from accessing basic needs, including shelter, for days. After the earthquake, social solidarity mechanisms quickly came into effect, and activities were carried out to meet urgent and basic needs. Vehicles and warehouses loaded with relief supplies belonging to various civil society organizations, professional associations, women's groups and activists, political party representatives, and volunteers were seized by the state. The activities of coordination centers established in the earthquake-affected provinces were hindered, and a state of emergency was declared in ten cities.

During this crisis atmosphere, our members and volunteers have participated in relief efforts in our provinces of Diyarbakır and Hatay, Maraş, Gaziantep, Malatya, and Adıyaman since the second day of the earthquake. Teams consisting of 7-10 women were sent to each province, and coordination of shelter and food, identification and distribution of basic necessities, and delivery of supplies to villages that were difficult to reach were carried out for 7-12 days. In addition, women's tents were set up to meet hygiene and care needs specific to women.

Through our feasibility studies conducted in addition to identifying housing problems and basic needs, we observed that women, children, and refugees have been disproportionately affected by the human rights violations that earthquake victims have faced. Weakened security mechanisms during crisis have led to various human rights violations, particularly the right to life.

Syrian refugees, who are especially subject to systematic discrimination, have been accused of crimes such as theft and looting by society and the media, and have been targeted and subjected to violence and torture. Also, their reluctance to speak Arabic has caused them to experience both loss of life in rescue operations and inability to benefit from shelter and aid materials. Conducting emergency aid activities, including search and rescue only in Turkish language has led to and continues to lead to many human rights violations for Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Armenians, and other communities living in the region. Similarly, individuals with different beliefs and sects have not been able to benefit equally from support and have experienced discrimination, especially in the distribution of tents and containers.

Conducting search and rescue activities simultaneous to debris removal activities has led to uncontrolled operations causing many casualties and the loss of physical integrity of those who lost their lives. As a result of the end of debris removal activities, thousands of people who could not be identified have been buried in unmarked graves and are still missing.

This crisis has not only affected human life but also caused harm to animals and the environment. Despite warnings from relevant experts, no precautions were taken against asbestos danger during the cleaning process of debris, and the random dumping of debris near water sources and in random areas has become a situation that threatens both human and environmental health. No search and rescue activities were carried out for pets, livestock, and street animals, and their nutritional needs were ignored. Due to a lack of food and water, livestock owners have been forced to sell their animals at prices far below their value to people coming from other cities.

As of March 13, 2023, it has been determined that the housing problem has not been resolved and basic needs, especially clean drinking water, toilets, and showers, are not being met in many regions and particularly in villages due to hygiene problems resulting in the onset of epidemic diseases. Despite more than a month passing since the earthquake, the inability to meet even basic needs has deepened human rights violations and created new problems. Women and children were primarily affected by this crisis, and the effects of pre-existing gender inequality have increased.

Neglect and Violations against Women

(Hatay, Adiyaman, Maraş, Antep, and Malatya)

- From the moment the earthquake occurred on, women have tried to protect their children, elderly or disabled dependents without ensuring their own safety; they have been found more often in children's rooms or other people's bedrooms during search and rescue and debris removal operations.
- Women have lost their lives by wasting time trying to leave their homes or secure themselves in their current location by engaging in actions to find their headscarves, skirts, jackets, and protect valuable accessories in their homes.
- Since the individuals with different ethnic identities and immigrants living in the region do not speak Turkish and women who are more involved in domestic labor and care work cannot learn other languages than their mother tongue, these people were unable to communicate with outside in order to provide their location or respond to the calls for help while they were trapped under the rubble.
- The low literacy rate among women has caused them to have limited access to disaster-related information, and thus they were unable to be informed about protective measures during the disaster, which has led to more loss of life.
- During post-disaster crisis situations, women and girls can be exposed to human rights violations such as sexual violence, exploitation by human traffickers, and psychological and physical violence. Factors such as insufficient lighting in housing areas, failure to take security measures, tents being erected in a manner that invades privacy and proximity to each other, and unsafe tents contribute to these violations. Decreased safe areas make women more vulnerable to violence from strangers and lead to more obvious cases of domestic sexual violence.

- Failure to take measures to ensure the safety of women who have protection orders or restraining orders, who are divorced or in the process of divorce, has made them vulnerable to attacks. The lack of safe spaces has led women to be subjected to violence by their former spouses or the individuals covered by the restraining order.
- The inability of women to access menstrual products, clean underwear, and incontinence pads and their need to resort to unhygienic methods to meet these needs, has led to health problems such as fungal, cystic, and urinary tract infections. The lack of access to sexual and reproductive health products has led to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and increased the risk of unwanted pregnancies in the future.
- According to data from UNFPA (UN Population Fund), there are 226,000 pregnant women in the disaster area, and 25,000 births are expected in March. Trauma and stress can make pregnancy difficult for women, leading to weaning in breastfeeding mothers. The inability of pregnant women to get enough nutrition and their caregivers' responsibility to meet the nutritional needs of other family members further complicates their pregnancy process and leads to various health problems.
- In crisis situations where food is scarce, women and girls, influenced by prevailing social norms, reduce their consumption and try to meet the nutritional needs of men more. Individuals with dietary differences such as gluten-free, vegetarian, and vegan diets face difficulty accessing appropriate foods.
- People with special nutrition needs such as special diets, non-gluten diets, vegetarians and vegans have difficulties to access food suitable to their condition.
- The lack of washing and drying machines for clothes in tents and container cities leads women to hand-wash their clothes, and their responsibility for the cleanliness, maintenance, and organization of their living spaces increases their workload.
- The responsibility of women and girls to carry clean water and the long distances they have to travel to reach sources such as fountains increase the risk of physical difficulties and especially harassment or attack at night.

- The lack of sufficient amount mobile showers, portable toilets, and cleaning materials, prevent women in general and especially those who live out of the tent cities from meeting their needs or force them to meet their needs outside their private areas.
- The absence of dishwashing areas in tents leads to many areas being used randomly for this purpose. The scarcity of waste containers and the accumulation of garbage in areas close to living spaces lead to various hygiene problems and the spread of infectious diseases such as scabies, lice, and other diseases like cholera, typhoid, and rabies.
- The migration of the young population, especially in Pazarcık and Elbistan, in earthquake-stricken areas has led to a higher percentage of the elderly population compared to other districts. The inability of elderly individuals to take care of themselves and their need for support in many areas necessitates the creation of particular care areas for them. The inaccessibility of toilets, showers, and meal distribution areas in tent cities and other housing areas for elderly and disabled individuals leads to violations of their rights.
- The worrying news we hear both in the field and in the media about the safety of unaccompanied children and young women reveal that necessary security measures have not been taken, as well as alarming allegations about missing children.
- Especially when women lose their first-degree relatives, they experience psychological and emotional devastation, which deepens the traumas they experience even in the mourning process, as they are in a situation where they provide care and postpone their own health.

Recommendations:

- Preventing all forms of gender-based violence, especially sexual violence, and ensuring that these efforts are the main focus, informing women and girl children on this issue will prevent these violations.

- The lack of access to reproductive health products may lead to unwanted and high-risk pregnancies. It is necessary to ensure access to reproductive and sexual health products, to enable individuals to plan their families according to their wishes and to prevent sexually transmitted diseases.
- Necessities such as menstrual products, underwear, adult diapers, baby diapers, and formula require regular support.
- Because of increased physiological and nutritional needs, pregnant and lactating women may be more affected by malnutrition. At this point, regular support should be provided to pregnant and lactating women and newborns for their nutrition and other needs.
- Designing showers and toilets to respect privacy and meeting needs such as soap, shampoo, and towels will reduce feelings of shame and fear in women and girl children and allow them to use these areas comfortably.
- The number of places where clean water needs will be met, such as fountains, should be increased, they should be close to shelter areas, and these areas should be adequately illuminated.
- The health right, one of the fundamental human rights, should be provided in the mother tongue, gender, and age-related needs should be determined, and health service activities should be guaranteed. The health status of chronic patients, disabled, and elderly people should be monitored regularly.
- The inconsistent and unsatisfactory presentation of data on missing children by relevant ministries increases current concerns. Clarifying the allegations that children stay in some sects and communities, identifying the unidentified children, and regularly sharing the data of missing children with the public and civil society will prevent possible cases.
- Safe spaces should be provided for women and children with protective measures and restraining orders against certain aggressors. Legal aid mechanisms should be accessible to everyone. In addition to ensuring that emergency shelters, temporary accommodation, and short-term housing are of humane living standards, long-term housing solutions should also be developed.

- Emergency shelter places, temporary or permanent housing solutions need to be developed in humane living standards, in addition to long-term housing solutions.
- Artistic, educational, and supportive workshops should be organized as part of psychosocial support for women and children, and safe play areas should be built for children.
- The activities of civil society organizations, professional organizations, political parties, activists and volunteers who carry out solidarity activities should not be obstructed.
- Access to basic services, security and better living conditions should be ensured, and dignified living spaces should be constructed with the involvement of all segments of society.