



IRO Mission January 2001 Earthquake in India

The IRO first became aware of an earthquake in India on 26 January at approximately 3:00 pm. The epicenter was located in Gujarat province and had a magnitude of between 7.1 and 7.9 and was felt as far away as Pakistan. The IRO Spokesperson for Deployment and the President immediately discussed making an Offer of Assistance but decided to hold off temporarily due to a lack of information.

Details became known on 27 January with estimates of several thousand dead and up to 120,000 trapped. Preliminary alarm was raised with several NRO's and an Offer of Assistance as made to the Indian Embassy in Vienna as well as to the Austrian Embassy in New Delhi. An international mission team comprised of approximately 12-15 dog handlers from NRO's in Austria, Germany, Slovenia, Italy and the Czech Republic was initially planned. The NRO's responded extremely quickly with the KHD in Vienna offering 4 dog handlers, acoustic location equipment and medics and the ASB Berlin (D. Kühn) informed that it would be participating with another German ASB group. Slovenia was not able to receive government approval. The teams were ordered to stand down in the afternoon due to a lack of acceptance from the Indian government.

28 Jan: It became clear that relief organisations were being allowed to enter India without much red tape and a general call for assistance was made by the Indian government, but there continued to be no reaction to the IRO Offer of Assistance.

29 Jan: In a telephone call from the Indian Embassy, IRO Dog teams are urgently requested to be sent as soon as possible to Delhi. Shortly thereafter a call was received from the Austrian Embassy in Delhi asking whether dog teams had already arrived in India. An official letter regarding mission support was immediately transmitted. After internal clarification of the situation, Otto Lanz and Wolfgang Zörner agreed to send approximately 8 dogs on mission. Due to time constraints, only the KHD Vienna the SZKB were alerted.

30 Jan: The contingent of 8 dogs and 10 people was finally ready for departure to India from the Vienna International Airport. On a positive note, the dogs were able to remain with their handlers until 25 minutes before take-off before being loaded into the freight section of the plane. Arrival in Delhi occurred after midnight local time and the onward transport to the disaster scene could therefore not take place until the following morning. Upon arrival in Bhuj, the contingent was informed that local mission control did not wish to make use of the dogs! As a result, transport to the town of Bhachau, approximately 70 km away, was organised. The journey lasted 3 hours and was horrifying. There were practically no buildings left standing in Bhachau and international relief consisted of a single Russian SAR team. The IRO contingent set up camp, as it was already dark, and began the search immediately.

31 January: Dog handlers were transferred to Adhoi, a completely destroyed and abandoned city where deaths were estimated to be between 1,500 and 2,000 and where no relief teams had yet reached. Soldiers and firemen were working only with crow bars and many people were lying around injured and dazed. Businessmen from Bombay had set up a field hospital on their own initiative and at their own cost and had brought in doctors as well. Morale of the dogs and handlers was good although the hot weather and long journey had taken their toll on the dogs. Dogs were occasionally irritated by free-roaming wild boar and monkeys.

01 February: While the first European relief teams (THW and REDOG) were already on their way home, the IRO contingent continued to work in Adhoi. Their achievements up to that point: the recovery of 9 dead, 1 living dog, and uncountable statues and sacred treasures uncovered while digging through the rubble of a temple trying to reach possible victims still trapped in air pockets.

02 February: Received reports that the IRO contingent had its camp in Adhoi, but was being deployed in Bhachau. Due to the heat, there was virtually no longer any chance of locating living victims and the return to Bhuj was planned for Saturday followed by the return flight to Delhi.

03 February: A severe aftershock was reported in European media and attempts to contact the IRO contingent failed. When contact was finally established, there was a great sense of relief. Due to the aftershock, the teams were still needed and the return flight to Delhi was postponed accordingly.

05 February: The AUA aircraft from Delhi landed at Vienna International at 5:50 am and was followed by a press conference before the teams were finally able to start their homeward journey.

IRO Dog Handlers in India:

Head of Contingent: Dr. Wolfgang ZÖRNER (A), SKV-KHD Vienna, Dog Handlers: Magdalena KOCZERA, Andreas HAUK and Andreas WITTMANN. Dog Handler and Acoustic Location: Peter SCHÜLER. Medic and Acoustic Location: Herbert JOHN. SZBK, (CZ) Dog Handlers: Daniel SEDLAK, Jaroslav SEDLAK, Jitka SEDLAKOVA and Zdenek CMEJREK.