

Report From the UN: Earthquake Toll Mounting

Since South Asia was struck by a major earthquake Oct. 8, this disaster area—mainly Pakistan—continues to be the first item at the daily noon briefing at the U.N., and for good reasons. The massive destruction of major towns and entire villages (UNICEF estimates that 140,000 schools have been destroyed), the very difficult mountainous terrain, the approaching winter weather, and the enormous damage to roads, water, and sanitation make this the most difficult disaster to respond to in recent memory, according to a report from the World Health Organization (WHO).

As of Oct. 19, the death toll stood at 40,000, with at least 65,000 injured. Thousands of people in urgent need of medical attention have still not been attended to, and many injured may die or develop disabilities unnecessarily, because of lack of timely treatment. Reports of gangrene and hypothermia continue to grow, and an estimated 50-60% of the population in need have not yet received any food rations. About 350,000 “winterized” tents are required.

Although there are no reports of outbreaks of epidemics as of Oct. 19, the lack of clean drinking water and sanitation facilities is creating major health threats such as diarrhea, typhoid, and other waterborne diseases. In response to this, the WHO has in the last days sent out an appeal for urgent action to provide safe drinking water for the area. —*Leni Rubinstein*