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A look at the impact of delivering aid to Turkey and Syria

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through Dubai's global hub February 8, 2023 · 12:25 PM ET Heard on All Things Considered **AYA BATRAWY** 

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need. But from its global logistics hub in Dubai, the U.N. agency tasked with international public health has already loaded two planes with critical medical supplies, enough to help some 70,000 people. One plane is destined for Turkey and

and stretchers, to help with crushing-type injuries from the earthquake. Color-coded labels help identify which kits are for malaria, cholera, Ebola and polio for countries in need around the world. Green labels are reserved for emergency health kits — those for Istanbul and Damascus.

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Supplies are stored inside one of the 20 warehouses belonging to the World Health Organization's global logistics hub in Dubai's International Humanitarian City. Aya Batrawy/NPR The kits can be delivered straight to a health care center to immediately begin treating patients.

"The weather conditions are now not looking so great. So it just depends on the condition of the roads, the availability of the trucks and then the permission to cross the border and deliver the humanitarian aid," he says. For government-controlled parts of northern Syria, aid groups are mostly sending assistance to the capital, Damascus. From there, the government is handling relief

The WHO's own staff in the southern Turkish city of Gaziantep are struggling amid the

themselves. "The goal is to be ready in case of emergency," says Giuseppe Saba, the chief executive

"The reason we are doing quite a lot and the reason why this hub became the largest

one in the world is exactly because of its strategic position," Saba says. "From Dubai,

in a few hours' flight, you can serve two-thirds of the world's population living in

Blanchard describes the support as "truly vital." The hope now is that supplies will

"We would like it to go faster," he says, "but these were such large shipments. We

Due to a problem with the plane's engine, WHO supplies for Damascus were still

grounded in Dubai as of Wednesday evening. Blanchard says the organization is trying

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massive warehouse. They will be shipped to Syria and Turkey for earthquake victims. Like other aid agencies, the World Health Organization is struggling to reach people in

the other for Syria. The organization has other hubs around the world, but its facility in Dubai, with 20 warehouses, is its largest by far. From here, the organization is sending planeloads of medicine, infusions for intravenous drips and anesthesia, surgical instruments, splints

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"The ones that we used in response to the earthquake are primarily trauma and emergency surgery kits," says Robert Blanchard, the team lead in Dubai for the WHO's emergency operations.

"Each kit is designed for 50 surgical interventions," he says. Blanchard is a former firefighter from California who worked in the Foreign Service

and U.S. Agency for International Development before joining the WHO in Dubai. He

says the organization is facing immense logistical challenges reaching victims of the

earthquake, but their Dubai warehouses help deliver aid rapidly to countries in need.

Robert Blanchard, the World Health Organization's team leader in Dubai for emergency operations, stands in one of the organization's warehouses in International Humanitarian City. Aya Batrawy/NPR International aid workers struggle to reach people affected by

Aid has begun flowing into Turkey and Syria from around the world, but organizations

are struggling to reach the most vulnerable. Rescue teams are racing to reach survivors

in frigid temperatures, even as the hope of finding people alive is diminishing with

The U.N. is trying to get into the rebel-held northwestern part of Syria through a

humanitarian corridor. Some 4 million internally displaced people there have little

heavy machinery of the sort that might be found in other parts of Turkey and Syria,

and hospitals are poorly equipped, damaged, or both. Volunteers are digging through

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the quake

every hour.

rubble with their bare hands.

Blanchard describes the situation as "very uncertain."

efforts into hard-hit cities like Aleppo and Latakia. In Turkey, poor roads and

"They're not able to go home because their homes have not been cleared by an

living in the office and trying to do work at the same time."

**Dubai is an international aid logistics hub** 

of International Humanitarian City.

engineer as being structurally sound," Blanchard says. "They're literally sleeping and

The WHO's warehouses are part of a 1.5 million square-ft. zone of Dubai known as

is also home to warehouses for the U.N. refugee agency, World Food Program, Red

International Humanitarian City, the largest humanitarian hub in the world. The zone

aftershocks have complicated relief efforts.

destruction.

Cross and Red Crescent organizations, UNICEF and others. The government of Dubai covers the cost of storage facilities, utilities and flights carrying relief items into affected areas. The inventory is procured by the agencies

A forklift driver loads healthcare materials to be sent to Ukraine at the UNHCR warehouses, part of the International

Saba says \$150 million worth of emergency stock and assistance is dispatched every

year to between 120 and 150 countries. That includes personal protective equipment,

tents, food and other critical items needed in climate disasters, medical emergencies

Aid from this location is sent to countries such as Yemen, Afghanistan, Nigeria,

Humanitarian City in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, in March 2022.

and global outbreaks, like the COVID-19 pandemic.

Southeast Asia, Middle East and Africa."

reach people within 72 hours of the earthquake striking.

needed a full day to build them out and prepare them."

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Uganda and Haiti.

for direct flights to Syria's government-controlled airport in Aleppo, a situation he describes as "evolving by the hour." international aid earthquake in turkey world health organization turkey syria earthquake

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