

Emergency Management in Turkey

Adil Özdemir

Turkey has been exposed to natural disasters throughout history. The main sources of these natural disasters have been earthquakes, floods, erosion and avalanches. Disaster response policies in the republican era started after the Erzincan Earthquake in 1939; however, measures taken for disasters were limited to temporary shelter and reconstruction and recovery activities. Natural disasters experienced in the following years revealed the need for emergency response (search, rescue, emergency aid) policies. Relevant legal arrangements gave authorization for coordination to the provincial and sub-provincial governors in disaster areas.

“Crisis desk,” the common expression adopted recently, defines the coordination center led by provincial and sub-provincial governors. It comprises representatives of institutions contributing to emergency response activities (local administrations, the Armed Forces, the Red Crescent, civil defense units, health directorate, etc.). Preparedness for disasters is defined in the emergency response plans prepared by provinces and sub-provinces as described in Law No. 7269. In cases where a disaster is considered a national disaster, the prime minister’s office or the prime ministry’s crisis desk coordinates disaster response.

Turkey’s Emergency Management General Directorate, established two years ago within the Prime Ministry, is authorized to take pre-disaster, disaster and post-disaster action. This General Directorate, the implementing agency of the Marmara Earthquake Emergency Restructuring Project (MEER), works to establish a new emergency management scheme and organization.

The Turkish Armed Forces, the most trusted national institution, play an important role not only in search and rescue activities, but also in ensuring regional security. Moreover, the army’s command-control systems serve as a crucial alternative for civil use during the response phase.

The National Security Council, besides its role in crisis management during the response phase, aims at developing cooperation between the military and civil authorities in the pre-disaster period.

The prime minister's office, ministries, crisis management centers formed within public institutions and the provincial and sub-provincial crisis management centers are all responsible for managing and coordinating the post-disaster response. The General Directorate of Civil Defense of the Ministry of Interior Affairs is mostly active at the response phase and plays an important role in the implementation of search and rescue activities.

Activities conducted by the General Directorate of Disaster Affairs in the Ministry of Public Works and Settlements mostly focus on damage assessment and recovery. The Ministry of Public Works and Settlements constructs permanent dwellings and establishes of new settlements. The Red Crescent, organized as an association, is active at the response phase, responding to basic needs such as food and shelter.

Fire departments and the search and rescue teams of local administrations play an important role in the post-disaster phase. Local authorities contribute to mitigation efforts through responsibility for developing settlement plans. Moreover, the principle of on-site disaster management under modern emergency management structures places additional responsibilities upon local administrations. In addition, there are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in the areas of communication and search and rescue.

The emergency management system outlined above was sufficient in responding to local and regional disasters before 1999. However, this disaster response system failed in the 1999 Marmara earthquake since significant coordination problems were experienced. Following this large-scale earthquake, the Turkish emergency management system was reviewed. It was agreed that there was a need for a new system to ensure adequate coordination among institutions responsible for emergency response. The Directorate General of Emergency Management was established with the above objective. Unfortunately, it has not been able to assume a lead role since it was not equipped with the authority and resources required for coordination. The new authority's efforts were also hampered by lack of clear delineation of roles and responsibilities *vis-à-vis* other institutions.

The brief outline of the current structure highlights an important deficiency in the Turkish disaster management system, namely that there are several institutions working in the response and recovery phases, but few institutions actively involved in the preparedness and mitigation phases. Following the Marmara earthquake it became widely accepted that preparedness was the

main factor that could decrease a disaster's negative impacts. Turkey is still far from reaching acceptable results in this area. Reasons include contradicting legal formulation for responsible bodies, unclear institutional responsibility and the lack of capacity within institutions to successfully fulfill the risk mitigation roles they were assigned.

Although some institutions were assigned mitigation tasks, they could not properly fulfill them because the four main principles of modern and comprehensive emergency management were not grasped. The main reasons for this have been a lack of financial resources, unclear regulations, and inadequate coordination resulting in a duplication of tasks and responsibilities for several institutions.

One of the objectives of the Marmara Earthquake Emergency Restructuring Project (MEER) is to restructure the existing disaster risk management system to overcome these negative aspects. There is resistance to the restructuring process that may be understood and even accepted. However, it is unacceptable that this resistance becomes an obstacle to change.

In situations where protecting human life is the primary responsibility of the state, narrow-minded institutional interests should not supersede the national interests in designing and implementing contemporary policies and strategies. Only then will it be possible to establish an institutional framework for a comprehensive emergency management system adequate for a country's needs. This system should integrate the preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery phases of the disaster cycle.

In the past, we have not been as successful as expected in establishing a single senior body to ensure effective cooperation and coordination between the relevant institutions in these four phases. The Emergency Management General Directorate, established two years ago, has a lot to overcome in order to ensure a healthy structure for these fragmented management bodies. This fragmentation is the main reason that prevents the application of a state policy free from political considerations.

In Turkey, 96 percent of the land is affected by earthquake risk and 66 percent contains active faults. It is possible that a strong earthquake could at any time affect an area in which 70 percent of the population resides. This area includes 11 large cities with populations of more than one million and 75 percent of the country's largest industrial complexes.

Damage from earthquakes corresponds to seven percent of the annual national income. This slows down Turkey's development rate by approximately one percent annually.

To establish an efficient emergency management strategy in Turkey, it is necessary to review in detail the existing system in light of successful worldwide experience and to put forward an emergency management model suitable for Turkey. An activity to achieve this goal has been the International Emergency Management Symposium hosted in Ankara, November 11-14, 2002, by the Emergency Management General Directorate. A total of 116 experts, mostly Turkish, participated in the symposium.

The general outcome of the symposium was the recommendation to establish a central disaster coordination authority in Turkey. Besides assuming a main role in emergency management, it was agreed that this new body should be an undersecretariat attached to the prime minister's office. It was also recommended that this organization be responsible for ensuring coordination among the relevant institutions during an emergency. The coordinating organization should also serve as a guide to produce and transfer knowledge and offer technical and financial support for training central and local government officials and communities.

It is also suggested that the main tasks and responsibilities of this undersecretariat:

- Ensure coordination between the prime minister's office, other ministries, and public, private and non-governmental institutions, and organizations at the central level.
- Arrange the coordination, flow of aid and information between central bodies and responders at the regional emergency management levels.
- Prepare and update response plans; provide financial assistance, information and training support for the central and regional-level emergency management units.
- Arrange manager training, professional training, and community training at the local level; produce and provide training materials; train the trainers.
- Conduct research and contribute to the development and upgrading of technical plans and construction regulations required for risk management.
- Pioneer activities in the development of risk profiles and plans for settlements; provide financial support for these projects.

The majority of delegates to the symposium agreed that the main condition for ensuring the efficiency of the new coordinating body was managerial and financial autonomy free of political influence. To enable this central authority to successfully respond to disasters and mitigate their impact, it is necessary to ensure its institutionalization and strengthen its power in its designated areas of responsibility. There are four key factors in achieving this objective. This government unit should have:

- Administrative and financial autonomy
- A budget sufficient to fulfill its responsibilities
- Authorization to recruit qualified staff
- Authority for coordination which should be made explicit and legally sanctioned through legislation.

The definition and scope of disasters are expanding. The impact of natural disasters may change significantly as a result of human activity. In addition to natural hazards, uncontrolled technological developments can have disastrous impacts including nuclear and chemical accidents and crashes in technological systems. Coordination of tasks should cover response and prevention for natural and technological disasters. Responsibilities not included in the scope of the new unit are: armed conflicts, economic crises, and epidemics.

At the central level, the Turkish Armed Forces, Red Crescent, Directorate General of Civil Defense, and Directorate General of Disaster Affairs should all have a role in emergency management. From regional administrations the provincial and sub-provincial governors should be included. Regional commissions should comprise mayors, the heads of scientific affairs, the chiefs of police and fire departments, health directors, national education directors, and regional military officials. Groups to serve in regions should include members of these organizations and officials of non-governmental organizations and the private sector.

Increasing the capacity of local administration can improve risk prevention activities. The emergency management organization at the central level can provide technical and financial support to prevention and preparedness projects at the local level. This support will focus primarily on mitigation efforts, including promotion of earthquake-resistant construction, planning, enforcement and supervision of building codes, and training activities.

It is not easy to activate a new institution within a state administration. Existing institutions mostly resist transferring authority to other institutions and find it difficult to accept directives from a new establishment. Although,

representatives of each institution speak of coordination in emergency management, no single institution wants to be coordinated. Government decisiveness and commitment will have to work with these reactions and strive to manage resistance. The passage to an efficient permanent emergency management structure will only be possible through a rearrangement of the tasks and responsibilities of the institutions involved in disaster management. To operate the system effectively, new laws and regulations are needed. The Law of Disasters No. 7269 which outlines the tasks in damage assessment and reconstruction activities does not cover emergency management. The disaster management system should be re-defined through a new law that incorporates the provisions of each component. The Robert T. Stafford Act in the U.S. that defines the roles and responsibilities of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is a good example of comprehensive emergency management.

The institutions within and outside the system and the current legal framework in Turkey do not provide effective and high quality emergency management. The existing structure prevents the country from responding to the requirements of the 21st century and to new, ever-changing world conditions. After the recent earthquakes, Turkey looked war-affected. The August 17 earthquake killed approximately 18,000 people in 41 seconds. The lingering impacts still affect the country's economic and social spheres.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Within the framework outlined above, the most important aspect of modern emergency management is the coordination of public agencies active in disaster management. To ensure this coordination, a new authority should be established. The new organization should be :

- At the level of an undersecretariat
- Directly connected to the prime minister or to a minister of state
- Overseeing the General Directorates of Civil Defense and Disaster Affairs; possessing sufficient financial resources and autonomy
- Administratively independent and able to recruit its own staff.

In addition, it should be emphasized that efficient emergency management can only be established based on modern and realistic principles determined by current needs. Organization should reflect needs arising from the mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery phases of disasters.

Emergency management organization should have at least four units and they should be organized according to these four essential phases.

In conclusion we summarize some of the essential principles:

- Since mitigation comprises a wide area of disciplines, many organizations should be involved in the risk mitigation, planning and decision making processes.
- There should be a coordinating authority for preparedness and response. A single entity could assume responsibility for both phases.
- Wider information dissemination and involvement in decision making processes pre-disaster should improve the recovery phase. Administrative authority can be granted to relevant organizations to administer funds.
- The new coordinating body should have direct contact with local authorities, NGOs, and the Red Crescent. Special effort is needed in defining standards for training, equipment, fire brigades, and search and rescue teams. Authorization is also needed for the allocation of resources for these purposes. In line with this approach, the new organization should include related units.
- During emergencies, authorities should coordinate activities with the Turkish Armed Forces, a widely respected institution.
- Financial resources are a major concern when establishing a new organization. In this case, the necessary loan has been provided by the World Bank. To move the MEER project forward, therefore, political decisions must be made now.