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REPORT

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OF A

STUDY MISSION TO THE AZORES, PORTUGAL

January 4-7, 1980

TO THE

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## FOREWORD

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, D.C.*

This report has been submitted to the Committee on Foreign Affairs by Hon. Margaret Heckler, who conducted a study mission to the Azores, Portugal, January 4-7, 1980.

The findings in this report are those of Representative Heckler and do not necessarily reflect the views of the membership of the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

CLEMENT J. ZABLOCKI,  
*Chairman.*

(III)

BY APPOINTMENT

TO HIS MAJESTY

THE KING

OF GREAT BRITAIN

AND OF IRELAND

IN PARLIAMENT ASSEMBLED

FOR THE PURPOSE OF

THE BETTER GOVERNMENT

OF HIS MAJESTY'S

REALM OF GREAT BRITAIN

AND OF IRELAND

AND OF THE

PLACES THEREunto

BY HIM SOVEREIGNLY

AND SEVERALLY

ANNEXED

TO HIS MAJESTY'S

CROWN

AND OF THE

PLACES THEREunto

BY HIM SOVEREIGNLY

## LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
*Washington, D.C.*

HON. CLEMENT J. ZABLOCKI,  
*Chairman, Committee on Foreign Affairs,*  
*U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C.*

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: On January 1, a devastating earthquake shook the Azores Islands of Terceira and Sao Jorge. In the aftermath of that earthquake, numerous and conflicting reports were received in the United States concerning the amount of damage and the types of assistance needed.

Because of the importance to the United States of the U.S. base at Lajes Field, which is located on Terceira, and because of the close relationship between Portugal and the United States, I felt that it would be useful to visit the Azores.

From January 4 to 7, I toured the areas affected by the earthquake and met with United States, Portuguese, and Azorean officials to discuss ongoing and future relief assistance, particularly with respect to the U.S. role therein.

I was accompanied on my trip by Janean Mann, minority consultant of the Subcommittee on International Operations, and Edward Cabral of my congressional district office staff.

In closing, I would like to express my appreciation to all of those, both in the United States and in the Azores, for their assistance and hospitality during this study mission.

It is my hope that this report will be of assistance to the committee in its consideration of any additional assistance to Portugal for use in the Azores.

Sincerely,

MARGARET M. HECKLER.



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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this mission was to view the damages left by a major earthquake which struck the Azores Islands on January 1, 1980, and to assess the relief efforts underway, with emphasis on U.S. current and future actions from the standpoint of both the Federal Government and the private sector.

Following the earthquake, numerous and often conflicting reports were received in the United States concerning disaster assistance needs and responses.

As a result, Hon. Margaret Heckler, accompanied by a personal staff aide and a Foreign Affairs Committee minority consultant toured Terceira, Azores, the island most heavily affected by the earthquake January 5-7.

During that period Mrs. Heckler met with Joao Mota Amaral, President of the Regional Government of the Azores; Adm. Carnoto Mouro de Silva, Minister of the Republic; Alvaro Monjardino, President of the Regional Assembly; Bishop Don Auelio Granada Escudeiro, Bishop of the Azores; Carrieta da Cunha, coordinator for earthquake relief; Red Cross officials; Brig. Gen. Richard Drury, commander, U.S. Forces, Azores; U.S. Consul General Ruth Mathews; Don Finberg, USAID, Lisbon; and other Portuguese and Americans involved with the relief effort.

At 3:45 p.m. on January 1, a major earthquake, registering 7 on the Richter scale, devastated thousands of buildings and homes on two of the major islands of the Azores.

The Azores, a chain of nine islands some 900 miles west of Portugal, is an autonomous region of the Republic of Portugal. The islands have a combined population of approximately 320,000 and a per capita income of \$600.

Discovered in the early 15th century, the islands received their name from the açores or hawks found there. The islands, with the exception of Santa Maria, are of volcanic origin.

The Island of Terceira is also the home of the U.S. Forces, Azores, based at Lajes Field. In 1979, the United States signed an extension of the 1951 Defense Agreement with Portugal thereby permitting continued peacetime use of the base at Lajes Field through 1983. This base is a major refueling stop for U.S. military planes and was the principal launching point for U.S. assistance to Israel during the 1973 Middle East war.

The 1979 agreement provided \$60 million in grant military assistance and \$80 million over a 4-year period for development assistance.

The 1951 agreement authorizes U.S. wartime use of the base if NATO still exists and if both the United States and Portugal are involved in the war.

The earthquake of January 1 affected most seriously the islands of Terceira (population 61,029) and Sao Jorge (population 16,378) although the islands of San Miguel and Santa Maria Pico were also shaken.

At least 54 people were killed in the earthquake and an additional dozen are still missing. Hundreds were injured and an estimated 20,000 left homeless.

These figures, however, do not begin to reflect the magnitude of the disaster or the extent of the damage and the loss of the people.

Because of a combination of time, weather, and date factors, many of the islands' inhabitants were not in their homes and thus were spared injury or death. But the massive destruction of homes and churches left the peoples of Terceira and Sao Jorge stunned and in shock.

It also found the islands without an established mechanism for coping with a disaster of this scope.

On the island of Terceira, the 500-year-old principal city of Angra do Heroismo, with an estimated population of 25,000, and the villages of Doze Ribeiras, Cinco Ribeiras, Santa Barbara, Altares, and Biscoitos were most seriously affected. These villages sustained severe damage to 80 to 100 percent of the homes and stores.

Virtually all churches on Terceira were either destroyed or severely damaged. On Sao Jorge, the villages of Santa Antao and Topo were most heavily damaged and a number of that island's churches were destroyed as well.

Indeed, Bishop Escuidero indicated that the loss of so many of the churches had been a particularly sharp blow to the overwhelmingly religious and Catholic population.

Many of the buildings on the two islands, but particularly the homes and churches, were more than 100 years old and had been constructed of volcanic rock without the use of mortar.

The intensity of the tremor sent rocks from the tapered wall tops crashing into buildings and streets, thus causing the tile roofs to collapse.

In some villages, virtually every home was reduced to rubble.

Azores President Joao Mota Amaral informally estimated reconstruction costs at \$70-\$100 million over the next 3 to 5 years.

In sharp contrast to the widespread and massive destruction to buildings of this type construction were those of reinforced concrete which were virtually unaffected by the earthquake. In several villages the only building left standing was the school.

Indeed, most of the islands' schools, built in the last 20 years, were undamaged. They thus became a focal point for recovery, relief, and shelter efforts.

In the city of Angra do Heroismo and across the island, electricity was disrupted immediately and communications lines severed. The hospital in Angra suffered some damage and will need moderate repairs.

Facilities to house orphans and senior citizens were totally destroyed and new buildings to accommodate these people will have to be constructed.

Early reports outside the Azores of widespread measles and small-pox outbreaks in the islands were unfounded.

The U.S. base at Lajes received little damage, sustaining only cracks in several water and fuel storage tanks. Some off-base housing for American employees, however, was damaged and a few Americans sustained minor injuries.

## RELIEF EFFORTS

As noted previously, the surprise and scope of the disaster caused by the earthquake found the regional government and the people unprepared. Although the U.S. Agency for International Development's international disaster assistance program had provided some training for Portuguese officials in disaster relief, these individuals were on the mainland some 900 miles away and thus not immediately available.

The earthquake severed all communications between the islands and the mainland with the only remaining communications being those through the U.S. base at Lajes Field.

Both the Portuguese and the United States Governments were notified of the disaster through this communications route.

The U.S. response to the tragedy was immediate and substantial. Because of the lack of damage to Lajes Field, U.S. military and civilian personnel based there were able to turn their full attention to assisting the civilian population on Terceira and Sao Jorge.

Ambassador Richard Bloomfield released the total \$25,000 from his emergency fund for the relief efforts. Lisbon AID Director Donald Finberg and another AID staffer arrived January 2 to coordinate that Agency's efforts.

Within hours of the disaster, personnel under the direction of Air Force Brig. Gen. Richard Drury were assisting with rescue operations and helping to provide food, shelter, and clothing to the victims.

An operations center was established at Lajes which became the principal coordination point for disaster relief efforts. The center was manned around the clock by medical, technical, electrical, and other relevant specialists.

Four U.S. emergency generators were dispatched to sites around Angra including the main hospital, bakery, and telephone company.

Three medical teams and supplies were sent to the Angra hospital. Because of the relatively low injury rate, however, the teams were not needed, although their supplies were.

U.S. contributions of mattresses, blankets, and water were early and needed resources.

Although there had been numerous reports in the United States and elsewhere of food shortages on the two islands, Azorean officials and relief workers denied such shortages generally and none was observed.

There were conflicting reports over the need for baby food with Red Cross officials saying that adequate supplies were available but that there were some distribution problems.

Food was in evidence throughout Terceira and the main bakery, which supplies one of the staples of the Portuguese diet, was operating with the assistance of an emergency generator.

Because of a fairly rich soil and good climatic conditions, the Azores are nearly food self-sufficient and are, in fact, food exporters. Repeated questioning of all of those met during the visit indicated that food supplies at this time are adequate, although several individuals indicated a possibility that food might be needed in the future. They advised, however, that any shipments of food be delayed until the need for such shipments was determined.

There were reports of distribution breakdowns and, in fact, some were observed, although these appeared to be isolated cases. During the course of the study mission, procedures were established to check on food and other supplies to insure that they were reaching those in need and to insure that those in need were aware that such supplies were available.

In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake there were some shortages because most of the stores had been closed and distribution efforts were not fully operational.

Because there was no looting following the earthquake, the reopening of stores on January 5 and to a greater degree on January 7 helped to ease some temporary shortages of food and equipment.

The major milk processing plants were closed temporarily because of electrical outages but had resumed operations by January 7.

Medical care, likewise, was not an overwhelming problem. As noted earlier, coincidences of time, weather conditions and the holiday combined to avert far greater human tragedy.

Had the earthquake occurred at night, for example, when more people would have been at home, the death and injury rate would have undoubtedly increased dramatically.

The Angra hospital, while sustaining some damage, was able to meet most of the medical needs.

The island's 3 Red Cross workers were joined within 3 days by a 20-person Red Cross team from the Portuguese mainland and later by an International Red Cross representative from Geneva.

The greatest remaining need for both the immediate and long term is for shelter, although there is still a need for such items as folding cots, two-way radios, batteries, and diapers.

The U.S. Government has agreed to provide transportation for this equipment if it can be obtained from private contributions.

Because fiscal year 1980 appropriations are still tied up in conference and because of demands as a result of the Indochinese refugee crisis, U.S. disaster assistance funds are virtually nonexistent at this time.

In an effort to meet the immediate housing needs of the people, AID and the U.S. military airlifted 700 large tents from storage in Italy and distributed them to those most in need of shelter. Many of the earthquake victims were taken in immediately by friends and relatives with some homes, although small, providing shelter for more than a dozen people.

The Swiss Government also provided 100 tents and the Portuguese Government responded with a number of large tents as well.

AID also provided 1,000 blankets and the military donated another 2,000 plus 1,500 mattresses.

In addition, 666 Portuguese citizens were given emergency shelter and food at Lajes Field as were 165 U.S. personnel and dependents whose off-base housing had been damaged or destroyed.

Facilities at the base were also used for storage of salvaged furniture and personal effects.

Within the first week of the earthquake, 950 U.S. military and civilian personnel and dependents had been involved in the relief efforts.

The following table is a preliminary breakdown of U.S. assistance as of January 4, excluding military personnel costs. An estimated \$5,000 per day has been expended since that date.

Source or type of assistance:	<i>Amount</i>
Embassy emergency account.....	\$25, 000
700 tents, 700 waterproof covers, 1,000 blankets.....	325, 000
1,450 mattresses.....	68, 000
2,000 blankets.....	26, 000
Hospital supplies.....	3, 000
Food.....	3, 000
Civil engineer supplies.....	4, 000
Fuel and other supplies.....	13, 000
Local and civilian personnel.....	4, 000
Housing and food for Portuguese on base.....	4, 000
Total.....	475, 000

The need for housing and technical assistance in the construction of that housing was stressed by virtually everyone involved in the relief efforts, including President Mota Amaral, Bishop Escudeiro, Red Cross representatives, and U.S. military personnel.

President Mota Amaral indicated a need for prefabricated housing and said that a request would be forthcoming from the Portuguese Foreign Minister to the United States for assistance to meet these needs.

The regional government has established a central reconstruction fund, called *Fundo de Apoio y Reconstrucao*, through which all reconstruction will be channeled. President Mota Amaral indicated that Portuguese banks in the United States would open accounts for this purpose.

Contributions and assistance have also been received from the Governments of the Federal Republic of Germany and from Sweden as well as numerous private and religious groups including the Catholic Relief Service, *Caretas*, the Bishop of Germany, and others.

In addition, the Portuguese airline, TAP, has said that it will fly any goods contributed from Boston to the Azores.

### THE FUTURE

The Portuguese and the regional Azorean Government must address a number of questions with regard to a program of reconstruction.

Several of these decisions will impact on USAID projects underway in the Azores—projects which total approximately \$9 million in loans and \$1.5 million in grants. These projects are in addition to the approximately \$20 million annually which the Portuguese Government intends to spend in the Azores over the next 4 years as a result of United States grant economic assistance to Portugal.

Among those questions which must be addressed are: Should buildings be repaired or razed and replaced? Should the villages themselves be razed and their residents resettled in new housing at other locations? What about USAID projects which were underway, but which may have been affected by the earthquake?

One such loan project, for example, was providing water to a series of towns. At least one of these towns was almost completely destroyed although the system under construction remained intact.

It would appear that no decision with regard to these projects should be made until the future of the towns is determined.

Another is a loan project for basic sanitation in Angra—a city which some Government officials have recommended be razed and its residents moved to an enlarged city of Praia.

### CONCLUSIONS

Although stunned by the tragic events of January 1, the people on the island of Terceira and, indeed, all of the residents of the Azores appeared deeply committed to rapid recovery efforts. Perhaps Bishop Escuidero reflected this attitude most accurately when he said, "we do not lose our faith and confidence. We are ready to work and rebuild."

Indeed, during the 3-day period of this mission, there was a noted movement toward a return to normalcy on the island with people returning to jobs, where possible, reconstruction efforts underway everywhere, and plans being made to reopen the schools for student use.

This attitude was reflected by the manner in which relief and recovery efforts were being organized notwithstanding the lack of a structure for handling such an emergency prior to the earthquake.

The relief efforts are proceeding well and most of the basic needs of the victims are being met and every effort is being expended to reach those people in need of assistance.

Some early distribution problems are being overcome.

Long-term housing needs have yet to be fully assessed as have long-term development needs of the islands in view of the widespread damage caused by the earthquake.

Rumors of diseases such as smallpox and measles are unfounded as are reports of starvation.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Assuming a request from the Portuguese Government for reconstruction assistance, the United States Government should respond favorably, possibly with an addition to the fiscal year 1981 request for Portugal or a supplement to the 1980 budget.

Such assistance should include either funds for or prefabricated housing.

Technical assistance, possibly in the form of Army Corps of Engineers personnel, should be provided if requested.

In addition, the AID disaster training program should be provided to Portuguese officials living in the Azores.

Private contributions should be provided to help meet the needs for cots, radios, et cetera, and to aid in the reconstruction of the churches.



