

RESTRICTED



Italy ✓
Fu. Nind

THE ITALIAN EARTHQUAKE OF NOVEMBER 1980

SUMMARY

1. HMG contributes £500,000 in the form of prefabricated building units to the earthquake zone. Good vantage point from which to review the earthquake, which occurred when the Prime Minister was in Italy for bilateral talks with Signor Forlani. (Paras 1-2).
2. Disaster a major one. President Pertini on television criticised the inadequacy of the rescue operations. Minister of the Interior offered his resignation. Ex-government junior Minister, Zamberletti, appointed Special Coordinator for the earthquake. (Paras 3-4).
3. Aid flowed in. As harsh winter conditions set in, urgent need to get survivors into weather-proof accommodation elsewhere but earthquake victims refused to move. Caravans provided some temporary relief. Problems of poverty and crime exacerbated situation. (Paras 5-7).
4. Warm response from abroad, including prompt aid from UK. Adoption of villages of Solofra and Serino. Considerable private assistance from Britain and the British community in Italy, with other towns being "adopted". (Paras 8-9).
5. Disappointing visit of Mr Young but future task now is to see that prefabricated units paid for by HMG are properly erected; possibility of future orders on commercial terms. (Paras 10-11).
6. Pressures on the Forlani Government as a result of the earthquake. In all, the Italians did not do badly; and were certainly not helped by the bad press. Future for the area uncertain; some parts may get a facelift but the essential problem of the Mezzogiorno will remain. (Paras 12-13).
7. Recognition for British aid given in many different ways. HMG's decision to build prefabricated units a wise one. Our help is widely appreciated. (Para 15).



BRITISH EMBASSY,
ROME.

7 February 1981

The Rt Hon The Lord Carrington KCMG MC
Foreign and Commonwealth Office
LONDON SW1

My Lord,

THE ITALIAN EARTHQUAKE OF NOVEMBER 1980

1. On 27 January the Lord Privy Seal announced in the House of Commons that the Government would contribute up to £500,000 in the form of prefabricated building units, to help reconstruction in the southern Italian zone stretching from Naples to Avellino and Potenza devastated by the November 1980 earthquake; by early March the first units should be on their way out. The Italian Government have welcomed this decision, taken at a time of extreme financial stringency. It caps the British private and official aid which has already been provided and affords me a convenient vantage point from which to give an account of the earthquake, its aftermath, the Italian and international response, and the wider political consequences in Italy. The story is far from complete but the preliminary phase at least is over.

2. The earthquake occurred at 19.34 hours on Sunday 23 November 1980 when the Prime Minister and you yourself were engaged in talks with the new Italian Prime Minister, Arnaldo Forlani, and Foreign Minister Emilio Colombo at the Villa Madama in Rome. Those present noticed the chandeliers sway and suspected an earth tremor. Tremors were even felt in Bologna and as far south as Sicily. But the first reports that came in were of a relatively small earthquake with casualties in the hundreds. Signor Colombo, himself from the affected area was alarmed and anxious to get to his constituency in Potenza that night. The Prime Minister brought the evening to a close early in order that Signor Forlani could be freed to deal with the situation.



3. It was not until the following morning that it was clear that the disaster was a major one with grave damage throughout an area the size of Belgium, affecting 164 centres of population and some 5 million people. Although the evening had been fine and the inhabitants of many villages had been strolling in the streets, large numbers were killed as churches and other buildings collapsed. Estimates of the death toll quickly rose. As soon as it was possible for helicopters to cover the area, it was seen that the devastation was unevenly spread over a large mountainous area of scattered and in many cases inaccessible hilltop villages. The final count puts the number of dead at 3,100 with a further 7,671 injured and 1,575 still missing; half a million people were made homeless.

4. The first two days after the disaster were administrative chaos. Unlike the last major Italian earthquake in Friuli in 1976, there were no contingents of the Italian Army (most of which is stationed in the North of Italy) near at hand to give immediate help, and nothing was made easy for the rescuers. The earthquake occurred at the worst possible time, a Sunday evening, and in a hilly, remote region with poor roads and other communications. The local authorities, never well organised, proved in some cases to be wholly inadequate; the Prefect of Avellino, one of the two principal towns in the zone itself, resigned. President Pertini (like the Pope) visited the area on 25 November. Even such a well loved and respected figure was greeted by the villagers with bitter accusations and insults. Stung, he returned to Rome to broadcast a sweeping condemnation of the inadequacy of the Italian state, its administrative failure and the worthlessness of a legislature which passed laws (after the Friuli disaster) and then failed to execute their provisions for emergency preparation against natural disaster. The Minister of the Interior, Rognoni, offered his resignation. A political compromise quickly cobbled together meant it was not accepted. Zamberletti, an experienced Minister left out of the Forlani Government who had been responsible for coordination at Friuli (and known to us when he deputised in Brussels for Colombo), was appointed special coordinator, and set up his operations centre in Naples.



5. It was not until 25 November that a national relief and rescue operation was mounted. In an area from which most of the young men emigrate to find work, many were able to return from Germany or Switzerland to their villages, some even before the Italian Army or other government agencies had brought help. The first contributions were made by volunteers from Naples and elsewhere, working desperately with inadequate equipment to pull victims alive or dead from the rubble. By mid-week the flow of aid began to choke the access roads. Meanwhile, unusually harsh winter conditions set in. Minor tremors continued and even those villagers whose houses remained standing, would not take the chance of re-entering them. They slept in cars or under makeshift tents, which the weather transformed into frozen shelters. That neither exposure nor epidemic in the end claimed more than a few victims reflects credit on the emergency health services organised by the Italian authorities.

6. Conditions varied in the area. Some villages were almost totally destroyed. Elsewhere, many houses were standing but could not be regarded as safe without expert examination. The urgent need, particularly in the worst hit villages, was to get the surviving population out of the area into weather-proof accommodation elsewhere. Southern Italians, attached to their land and their villages regarded their only chance of compensation, a new house or recovering their possessions under the rubble, as staying put. Zamberletti talked of moving the people out of the area to eg hotels and summer homes on the coast; new permanent homes would then be built at or near the original village site. But past experience, at Friuli and in Sicily, had created a prejudice against temporary accommodation associated with a "shanty town image". Earlier Italian earthquakes had left many without permanent homes for more than a decade.

7. Zamberletti's plan proved impracticable. The owners of second homes would not make them available. The earthquake victims would not leave the ruins. The authorities were squeamish about requisitioning. Convoys of caravans provided some immediate relief. Zamberletti in conversation with me, and more guardedly in public, said that between caravans and permanent conventional housing, there was a place for good quality prefabricated units



not only for housing but for community purposes; it was essential to get community life going again. Apart from the zone of devastation, things were chaotic in Naples. To the chronic problems posed by poverty and crime, low standards of housing and many without proper homes, were added thousands of refugees who came into Naples which itself had many buildings damaged and unsafe for habitation. When I was there a couple of days after the earthquake tens of thousands were camping out in streets and squares, afraid to sleep in their homes.

8. The immediate response to the disaster was warm and generous both in Italy and abroad. Within the first week, there were contributions from the governments of most of Italy's major allies and from a wide range of charitable organisations. I met the first 'plane load of relief supplies from Her Majesty's Government, containing blankets and tents, on its arrival at night in Naples as early as 25 November. By 26 November, Mr John Campbell, HM Consul-General at Naples, had received an appeal from the Mayor of Solofra, a formerly prosperous small town with British trading connections. He was able to ensure that two further 'plane loads of British Government aid should go to Solofra and the neighbouring village of Serino on 26 and 27 November. I directed that we should concentrate our aid on this zone where we could be sure it would be effective. Other governments contributed generously, with the French, German, Austrian, Swiss and Yugoslavs being able to make available substantial numbers of specialist military personnel to help in the rescue and clearance work. The large German contingent of army engineers was well publicised. On 1 December, the European Council decided in principle on the provision of a loan to the value of 1,000 million European Units of Account, with an interest rate subsidy of 3% for a maximum of 12 years, as the Community's contribution to financing reconstruction in the South. Within Italy, Trieste was the first town to "adopt" a number of stricken communes, and many others followed suit.

9. Meanwhile, private assistance from Britain and the British community in Italy was prompt, welcome and generous. HM Consul-General Naples set up a British Community Fund soon after the disaster (this has now reached £40,000). Supplies of waterproofs and underclothing, medicines, beds and Christmas parcels were made available to areas of our two adopted communes, where British



personnel worked with the local authorities, notably in the first days after the disaster, when Admiral Sir Peter Buchanan from NAVSOUTH, with British officers and men from his staff and their wives, the Campbells, members of my staff and wives, all helped to ensure that the 'plane loads of British tents, blankets, medical supplies and other aid found their destination. Various British charities, among whom the Rotary Club and the Round Table, have launched appeals in the United Kingdom, and supplied at least 148 caravans, truck loads of clothing, and heaters. London Transport supplied ten red buses for use as shelters or centres, and I was able to meet them in Rome on their way down to ensure national television coverage. The Save the Children Fund have "adopted" the towns of Brianza and Sasso in the Potenza area, where a group of British Council Youth Exchange volunteers have been working. The British-run St George's School in Rome has "adopted" the devastated village and school in remote Pescapagano.

10. There was a setback when Mr Simon Young, who was anxious to establish a major charitable fund in the City of London, visited the area together with Colonel Stokes of the Royal Engineers and concluded precipitately, after a single day's investigation, that it was not a suitable objective for his charity. This visit aroused expectations and could have provoked unfortunate reactions had not the Prime Minister later agreed that some public money might be used to meet the need for prefabricated buildings in particular.

11. Our task, which will fall largely to Mr Campbell in Naples in the Spring, will be to ensure that a manageable number of suitable prefabricated units are erected properly in the locations which the Mayors of Solofra and Serino have already chosen for them, that this British contribution works out well and that we get proper credit for it. The Crown Agents already have this work in hand. We may also hope that early experience with British prefabricated units in the region will lead the Italians to conclude that they should buy many more on commercial terms. Zamberletti's organisation coordinates the commercial purchase of communal and housing prefabricated buildings. British firms are seeking orders. We must therefore make a practical success of installing the units for which HMG is paying. This will depend on the Crown Agents, the firms, and on the coordinating role of the Consulate General in Naples. I very much welcome the Ministerial decision taken

/this week

RESTRICTED



this week that a small party of Royal Engineers should also be sent out to help supervise this project. Their presence will both contribute to ensuring that it is a practical success and greatly increase its public impact in the region.

12. Politically, the earthquake has put the Forlani government under great pressure. The fiscal measures (notably the tax on oil products) designed to raise extra revenue for reconstruction after the earthquake, had a bad reception and were strongly criticised, especially by the PCI. The Italian administration is never strong, least of all in the South, and their task is made far harder in this case by the proximity of Naples, and by the Mafia-style operators, and especially contractors, who abound in the Mezzogiorni, known generally as the Camorra. The problem of organising immediate relief was immense and I do not think that, after the first two days of chaos, the Italians did too badly. By the end of the first week, there were 30,000 Italian soldiers working in the area and the rescue operation was well under way. Certainly they were not helped by a great deal of panicky and even malicious reporting by the Italian and international media, all intent on portraying the disaster and subsequent chaos in the most lurid terms. The BBC was not immune from this criticism. Zamberletti's early plans did not work but it is hard to see how he could have failed to propose them. It is now generally conceded that both he and the Army did a good job after a shaky start.

13. In the end the result will no doubt be a patchwork: a proportion of the population will leave the already under-populated area permanently - some have emigrated to eg Australia, others will stay with relatives elsewhere; some will hang on in caravans or in the surviving houses, to be better placed to get something permanent; a lot of "temporary" prefabricated units will be erected which will be used for years to come. The plans for eventual re-building in the zone are still under discussion. Crumbling Naples may get a bit of a facelift and there is some plan for using the EC Regional Fund for its benefit. There has been much talk of the earthquake's affording an opportunity for the regeneration of the South. There will be some fillip to the local construction industry. The problem of hilltop villages which are anachronistic /will be



will be somewhat reduced, though not resolved. But the huge problem of the Mezzogiorno will remain. It was therefore wise to confine British Government aid to a limited area in which it can be managed directly in consultation with the local mayors without embroiling us in local politics or difficulties in Naples. It remains to be seen what will be done with the European Community loan.

14. I enclose:

- (i) a timetable of events relating to the earthquake;
- (ii) a summary of British aid, both private and government; and
- (iii) a list of contributions from other nations of which we are aware.

15. British aid has been given in divers ways, sometimes not even known to us in Rome or Naples, and one of my concerns has been to try to see that the extent of it is known and recognised here. I have ensured that the key Ministers are aware of the facts and we are taking various steps with the media. I believe the decision to give a further half million pounds for a government programme of prefabricated units was a wise one. Following the annus mirabilis of Anglo-Italian collaboration in 1980, it would have been a pity to do less. As it is, I am assured by many Italians from all walks of life, that not only is the British contribution most welcome in itself but the warm and friendly way in which our help has been given is deeply appreciated.

I have the honour to be

Your Lordship's obedient Servant

R Arculus



EARTHQUAKE

CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

November

- 23 Earthquake (Richter Scale 9) in Basilicata and Campania.
PM, with Forlani and Colombo at the time, expresses personal sympathy.
- 24 PM expresses sympathy for earthquake victims in an interview given to Italian TV.
- " Personal message from HM The Queen to President Pertini.
- " Zamberletti appointed Special Coordinator for the earthquake.
- 25 President Pertini makes a speech on TV criticising inadequacy of rescue operations.
- " First planeload of relief supplies from UK, carrying 5,000 blankets and 216 six-man tents, arrives in Naples. HMA meets aircraft on arrival at Naples.
- 26 HMCG Naples receives an appeal from the village of Solofra for British aid.
- " Minister Rognoni offers resignation as Interior Minister as a result of Pertini's TV speech.
- " Second planeload of relief supplies from UK, carrying 280 tents, 975 blankets and 100 ground-sheets, plus 6,850 blankets from the British Red Cross, arrives in Naples and is consigned to Solofra.
- 27 Rognoni agrees to withdraw resignation on invitation from Forlani.
- " Third planeload of relief supplies from UK, carrying 1,100 blankets, 164 six-man tents and 350 groundsheets, arrives Naples.
- 28 Italian Government publishes decree authorising Local Authorities to issue emergency identity documents to survivors of the earthquake who have lost documents and wish to travel abroad to join relatives.



November

- 28 Offer from the National Association of Fire Officers for 500 volunteers to go to Italy to help with relief operations. After consultation with Italian authorities, offer not taken up.
- 29 2 minibus loads of supplies from St George's School, Rome, go down to the village of Pescopagano.
- " Medical supplies from the UK, to the value of £10,182 arrive Rome. Handed over to the Red Cross.
- " Truckload of camp beds, mattresses, medicines and other supplies bought from collections raised by HMCG Naples, and the British Embassy staff, goes to Solofra and Serino.
- 29-4 Dec Volunteers from NATO erect tents in Solofra and Serino.
- 30 Planeload from "Save the Children Fund" containing supplies to the value of £25,000, arrives in the area.
- " Skelmersdale social workers, plus 2 doctors, 2 nurses and with 3 truckloads of supplies arrive in Matera to assist local authorities.

December

- 1 Zamberletti's "S plan" not having success as homeless refuse to leave land. Problem of profiteers persists.
- " European Council discusses EC aid to the earthquake zone.
- 2 Consignment by the British Round Table of 25 lorry loads of supplies for earthquake victims.
- " Aid from EC confirmed. To be available in one month.
- 4 Debate in the Chamber on the earthquake; delay in rescue operations acknowledged but state action defended.
- 5-8 Zamberletti's plan to use tourist villages and holiday homes as shelter for the homeless.
- 8 Decree law approved by Council of Ministers in favour of earthquake-stricken zones.



December

- 9 Requisition of holiday homes continues. Emergency phase to expire on 31 January.
- 10 Holiday homes owners stage demonstration along Baia Domizia.
- " First 4 caravans from Rotary and Round Table in position (2 in Solofra and 2 in Serino). More caravans en route.
- 11 Further 3 Rotary caravans arrive from UK.
- 12-14 Government's economic measures attacked by Trade Unions and also by Minister of Public Works, Nicolazzi. Zamberletti replies to criticism and says he has no intention of resigning. Allocation of money for first intervention increased by Senate to 1500 milliard lire.
- 17 HMA meets London Transport buses outside Rome, en route for Naples.
- 16-19 Mr Young, accompanied by Lt Col Stokes, visits Rome and Naples on reconnaissance visit of earthquake area.
- 17-19 Col. Baldini visits the UK to coordinate relief arrangements.
- 18 Ten London Transport Buses loaded with gifts arrive in earthquake area; 2 allocated to Solofra and Serino.
- 19 Zamberletti reports to the Council of Ministers on earthquake relief operations. Reconstruction of areas ruined by earthquake discussed by Zamberletti and La Malfa with CNEL.
- " Council of Ministers confirms Government support for Zamberletti who is to administer the second stage of relief operations, to continue until next summer.
- 30 Christmas parcels for 200 poor families - value £2,000 (approx) - distributed by HMCG in Solofra and Serino.

/1-2 Jan



January 1981

- 1-2 HMA visits Naples and has discussions with the Prefect, the Mayor, Zamberletti and NATO Commander in Chief.
- 2 Partial evaluation of damage of earthquake amounts to 8,000 billion excluding Naples.
- 16-17 Reconnaissance visit to Naples by Crown Agents to discuss the siting of prefabricated units. DA goes down to Naples to be present at the talks.
- 16 Requisition of 8,000 free flats in Naples.
- 19-22 Representative of Lesser Building Systems visits Naples for discussions on prefabricated housing.
- 20 Mrs Thatcher writes to Prime Minister Forlani informing him of British Government's decision to allocate £500,000 for the purchase of prefabricated buildings for the earthquake area.
- 21 Sig. Forlani replies to Mrs Thatcher's letter expressing gratitude for British aid.
- 27 Special Ministerial Committee, chaired by Sig. Forlani, meets to discuss reconstruction of the quake zones.
- " Lord Privy Seal makes announcement in the House of Commons of UK contribution to the earthquake.



ITALIAN EARTHQUAKE: BRITISH AID

- (a) British Government despatched four planeloads of relief supplies consisting of tents, blankets and medicines to Naples. Total value £215,000.
- (b) British community in Naples and British Embassy in Rome have adopted the villages of Serino and Solofra. Supplies of warm clothing, medicines and beds have been distributed in the towns and British personnel have been working there with the local authorities. Christmas parcels to the value of some £2,000 were distributed to needy families in the area and the British Community Relief Fund now stands at £40,000.
- (c) St George's English School, Rome, have adopted the town of Pescopagano and distributed several lorryloads of supplies to the area. The school has also raised over £12,000 to be spent on helping to equip a new school in the town.
- (d) Save the Children Fund have adopted the towns of Brianza and Sasso in the Potenza area. An Anglo/Italian group of British Council Youth Exchange volunteers (including a British doctor and two nurses) have been working in the area and five truckloads of medical supplies, warm clothing, blankets and tarpaulins have been distributed. The Fund has also supplied several caravans for use in the two towns. Total value of supplies and aid to date amount to some £40,000. Further funds from the Save the Children Fund, UK and Oxfam are expected to be spent on provision of prefabricated buildings for school(s) and/or welfare centres in the towns. A prefabricated school donated by a church organisation in Essex has been constructed in the area.

/(e)



- 2 -

- (e) London Transport have supplied ten buses for use as offices and/or shelter in the earthquake zone.
- (f) Various British charities including the Rotary Club and Round Table Association have launched appeals in the UK and supplied almost 148 caravans/mobile homes, 25 truckloads of warm clothing and 475 heaters for use in the area.
- (g) British Rail and British Airways issued free single or return tickets to Italian nationals resident in the UK who wished to go to the disaster area to care for relatives.
- (h) Help the Aged have already sent £60,000 and will probably send a further £30,000.
- (i) The British Red Cross despatched a consignment of blankets and medical supplies immediately following the earthquake. The organisation expects to spend about £300,000 on community centres which have been requested by the Italian Red Cross.



LIST OF OFFICIAL DIRECT GOVERNMENT AID TO THE EARTHQUAKE
FROM OTHER MAJOR NATIONS

1. WEST GERMANY

1 Field Hospital with 100 beds
1 Pioneer Battalion with 650 men
3 Helicopters
2100 Tents
1100 Blankets

2. USA

136 Paratroopers
6 Helicopters
1 Field Hospital with 25 beds
2000 Tents
20000 Blankets

Total value of the above plus further smaller items such as stoves, walkie talkies etc estimated at $3\frac{1}{2}$ million dollars. A further 50 million dollars will be provided and spent under joint US/Italo control.

3. AUSTRALIA

772,000,000 lire (State and Federal)
800 Tents

4. NETHERLANDS

61 Prefabricated buildings
45 Caravans

Estimated value 8 million guilders.



5. IRELAND

£100,000

6. CANADA

1,800,000 Canadian dollars provided initially. Further 6/7 million Canadian Dollars raised for second-phase relief, of which 75% is from private sources.

7. FRANCE

- 1 Battalion of engineers with heavy engineering equipment
- 1 Search and Rescue team with dogs
- 12 Tons of blankets and other supplies
- 1 Helicopter

8. AUSTRIA

- 1 Field Hospital
- 100 Prefabricated buildings (being organised through the Austrian Red Cross but with Government backing)
- 15 million Austrian shillings

9. JAPAN

20,000 US dollars initially with a further one million US dollars made available since.

10. SWITZERLAND

- 300 Tents
- 1000 Blankets
- 14 Teams of search and rescue dogs
- 1 Water purifier
- 2 Helicopters.

13 FEB 1981

