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GRAND PRIX OF THE CATASTROPHIC

**Temporary exhibition from 3 October 2007 to 27 January 2008
10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily except Tuesdays – admission free**

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Annexes :

- Brochure
- CD-Rom containing:
 - press photos, captions and copyrights
 - the text of the press file

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2006, natural disasters affected 134 million people and cost 35 billion dollars. Three weeks after the tsunami, over 700 million dollars had been released. Several months later, earthquake victims in Pakistan were dying for want of means to help them. Every dollar spent on prevention today could save four dollars on reconstruction tomorrow.

These are disturbing figures.

The exhibition reveals the ins and outs of the media coverage, financing and organization of relief operations. Throughout, objects and firsthand accounts shed light on various aspects of the activities undertaken in the tsunami's aftermath. A catastrophe of unprecedented proportions, the tsunami crystallized all facets of humanitarian action, from the best – the huge outpouring of generosity – to the worst – excessive competition. And what are we to make of the merchandising?

The exhibition also scrutinizes the ongoing quest for effectiveness of the professionals involved. Visitors will be intrigued, to say the least, at their kits, genuine “ready-aid” tools ranging in cost from a few francs to several millions.

Talk of natural disasters also reminds us that risk reduction, at a time of global warming, figures on the agenda of high-level summits, is front-page news and has even entered our homes, in the form of electronic games. With what results?

One of the exhibition's highlights is the earthquake simulator, a startling educational experience. Their hair dishevelled, shaken both literally and figuratively, visitors find themselves at the heart of the current debate: protection of the planet, north/south relations, the role of politicians, celebrity involvement, the limits to humanitarian action.

AND THE WINNER IS...

“A natural phenomenon is therefore not, in and of itself, a catastrophe, rather it becomes a catastrophe if it affects a vulnerable population. And the more vulnerable the population, the more catastrophic the consequences such a phenomenon will have. The concept of catastrophe is therefore bound up with the unequal terms on which people face natural risk.”

Andrea Boscoboinik

2. WHY THIS EXHIBITION?

General context

The exhibition is part of the *Tout peut arriver* programme launched at the initiative of the Geneva Natural History Museum.

Why this exhibition at the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Museum?

One of the principal missions of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement is to act in the event of natural disaster. Moreover, the Museum has mounted relatively few exhibitions on natural disasters in recent years.

What does the title mean?

“Grand prix” brings to mind:

1. organizations racing against time to respond to emergencies
2. the price, or cost, of disaster relief, the main aspect dealt with by the exhibition
3. the competition between today’s humanitarian practitioners

The thrust of the exhibition

The exhibition chooses to start the visitors thinking, to have them come up with their own answers – prompted by the drawings of MIX & REMIX. It uses examples from the past ten years or so, and spotlights views and concerns from the western perspective.

Design

Designed by **Raphaèle Gygi**, the exhibition takes the visitors through the various stages of a humanitarian operation mounted in response to a natural disaster. Visitors first enter a chamber where they are plunged into the torment of a cyclone. They then walk past a series of murals tilted to create a feeling of chaos.



« Les richesses s'accumulent en haut, les risques en bas. »

Ulrich Beck



3. GUIDE TO THE EXHIBITION

1) Start

Introduction

In 2006, natural disasters affected 134 million people and cost 35 billion dollars. Three weeks after the tsunami, over 700 million dollars had been released. Several months later, earthquake victims in Pakistan were dying for want of means to help them.

The exhibition reveals the ins and outs of the media coverage, financing and organization of relief operations. It also decodes the rules governing the new “humanitarian market”.

Today, the words compassion, empathy, generosity and solidarity are shaped by technical concepts handled by professionals: communication, fund-raising, return on investment in terms of image, effectiveness and control.

In a globalized world, the humanitarian sector is as subject to competition as any other. How are humanitarian agencies to reconcile emergency work with professionalism, media coverage of their messages with the dignity of the people concerned, transparency towards the donors with the victims’ true needs?

Indeed, let us not forget the victims: they are the reason for humanitarian action. They tell their stories at the centre of the exhibition.

What does the future hold? According to the experts, global warming will increase the number and intensity of natural disasters. As usual, it is the poorest of the poor who will suffer most. Prevention always has been and always will be much more difficult to finance than emergency action.

Rather than provide answers, the exhibition has deliberately chosen to start you asking questions.

And the winner is ...

Definitions

Disaster n. sudden or great misfortune, calamity; complete failure (a record of disaster).

The Concise Oxford Dictionary.

A **disaster** is a calamitous event resulting in loss of life, great human suffering and distress, and large scale material damage.

The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief.

Disaster: A serious disruption of the functioning of society, causing widespread human, material or environmental losses which exceed the ability of affected society to cope using only its own resources. Disasters are often classified according to their cause (natural or manmade).

Internationally agreed glossary of basic terms related to Disaster Management, United Nations, Department of Humanitarian Affairs.

2) « A votre bon cœur »

As soon as a catastrophe occurs, appeals for funds are launched. Nothing is left to chance. Media coverage stirs emotions and stimulates the generosity of private individuals, corporations and states alike.

3) « Charité bien ordonnée »

The number of natural disasters has tripled in thirty years. In 2006, there were more than 850. Some of them attract more funds than others. While the response to the earthquake at Bam in Iran and the landslides at Gondo in Switzerland broke all records for generosity, the hurricanes in Cuba or the drought in Rwanda left the public cold.

Some donors may promise more than they actually give...
Even generosity follows its own pecking order!

4) « Urgences »

The task in the first 48 hours is to save lives. The first help comes locally, from neighbours, the emergency services, the army and the organisations already present on the ground. They have the emergency funds and the qualified personnel needed for immediate action.

5) « Les experts »

After 48 hours, the humanitarian phase opens with the mass arrival of international aid. The heavier the media coverage, the greater the funds available and, of course, the more people there are, the greater the problems of coordination.

6) « Toujours prêts »

The emergency kits are ready and waiting, catalogued, numbered, stamped and complete with instructions for use. Over recent years, great efforts have been made to standardise relief materials in order to increase efficiency.

In every situation, water is THE number one priority.

According to the WHO, people need 25 litres of water a day to survive. In the developing countries, people use an average of 10 litres per day. In Europe, the figure is 200 litres.

7) At the centre: the victims tell their stories (see page 8)

« Entre le tsunami spectaculaire et le "tsunami silencieux" que représentent les trois millions d'enfants qui meurent chaque année de la malaria dans le Tiers Monde, la compassion se porte spectaculairement, massivement, aveuglément sur le premier. »

Jean-Pierre Dupuy

8) « Les experts 2 »

Nowadays, everything ends with an assessment and humanitarian action is no exception. This way, the professionals improve and the donors keep tabs on them. And the victims? Yes, they too get asked – sometimes.

9) « La bonne latitude »

Though it is difficult to predict the occurrence or the scale of natural catastrophes, it is possible to limit their impact. To reduce the vulnerability of the population, we need to prepare the people concerned, to establish early warning systems, to strengthen natural protection. This may cost less than emergency action but it is more difficult to finance.

And all the more so in the South.

A disaster of the same intensity results in more victims in a poor country than in a rich one. For example, the Bam earthquake measured 6.8 on the Richter scale and caused over 30 000 deaths. Yet, when a tremor with a strength of 8 hit Japan three months later, there was not a single fatality.

10) And the winner is...

11) « Certains l'aiment chaud »

Though scientists cannot agree about man's responsibility for global warming, the phenomenon itself is real enough and it is highly likely that it increases the frequency and intensity of disasters. The insurance companies are already factoring it into their premiums. But are disasters catastrophic for everyone?

12) « Refuge des bonnes idées »

Catastrophes make for best-sellers, with thousands of books and articles published on this subject every year. Very good for awareness-raising, if bad news for the forest!

13) Meanwhile, back on the beach...

“Thus, vulnerability is and has always been the result of an increase in social and economic inequalities on a local, regional, national and international basis.”

Virginia Araceli García Acosta

4. A FEW FIGURES

Did you know that:

... there were roughly **280** disasters in 1976 and more than **850** in 2006?

... the average temperature one million years ago was **12°C**, whereas today it is **15°C**?

... the *Chaîne du bonheur* (a Swiss charitable fund-raising agency) raised **74,209,125 Swiss francs** after the storms in Gondo (Valais, Switzerland) in 2000?

... after the tsunami:

- the average per capita private donation was **20.60 Swiss francs** in Switzerland and **0.005 Swiss francs** in China?
- by the eve of the Geneva conference of 11 January 2005, various countries had pledged **US\$ 3.364 billion**? Three days later, their written pledges amounted to **US\$ 734.9 billion**.
- **160** NGOs launched activities in Banda Aceh (Indonesia)?
- **80%** of the families affected in India thought that food had been distributed quickly enough, whereas only **60%** were satisfied they had been treated with dignity?

... the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies collected on average **246 Swiss francs** per victim of the earthquake in Bam (Iran) in 2003 and **1 Swiss franc** per victim of the drought in Rwanda in 2006?

... the three volumes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement's catalogue of emergency relief supplies fill **1,537 pages**?

... a sachet of oral rehydration salts costs **0.15 Swiss francs**, a fully equipped field hospital **4,578,650 Swiss francs**?

... a Doctors without Borders disaster kit for 1,000 people/two weeks costs **3,798.75 euros**?

« La course à l'audience des chaînes de télévision a fait de l'accident catastrophique un scoop, pour ne pas dire un fantastique spectacle unanimement recherché. »

Paul Virilio

5. THE VICTIMS TELL THEIR STORIES

« Il faut espérer que ces événements feront prendre conscience de l'énorme et tragique déséquilibre entre pays riches et pays pauvres. Si cela avait été fait avant, peut-être y aurait-il aussi moins de dégâts. »

Christine, Tsunami - Thaïlande, 2004

« Je n'ai pas frôlé la mort. J'ai été dans la mort. »

Sébastien, Tsunami, Thaïlande, 2004

"We've been blessed with a warm, safe place to stay, where people really care, while we struggle to get back on our feet. It's been hard to accept charity because we're the ones who usually do the giving. But the response we've experienced has meant the world to us."

Lisa Diamond, Ouragan Katrina - USA, 2005

« Nous étions riches, nous avions une belle et grande maison, avec un jardin. Aujourd'hui, nous n'avons plus rien et les gens des secours ne nous traitent pas avec dignité, ils nous jettent la nourriture comme à des animaux. »

Fatima, Tremblement de terre - Bam, Iran, 2003

"There are problems in every corner. There are other tragedies that occur. But free and kind people take time to help their fellow human beings. That was the experience here. People reached out their hands to help ease our pain and our suffering."

Mohamed Zadhe, Tremblement de terre - Bam, Iran, 2003

"Although everything has been destroyed by the earthquake, the promises and things given by relief organizations mean the people have become used to taking things. They have lost their traditional practices of self-help and self-reliance."

Anonyme, Tremblement de terre - Pakistan, 2005

« On ne veut pas aller ailleurs, on a toujours été là. On n'est pas morts, on est encore là ! On a encore quelques maisons et puis si on doit habiter deux, trois, dans le même appartement ça ne fait rien, mais on veut reconstruire ce pays. »

Anonyme, Glissement de terrain - Gondo, Suisse, 2000

"... is a disaster a set of physical impacts or a set of socially constructed perceptions?"

Anthony Oliver-Smith



7. ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

General information

Open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, except Tuesday

Museum shop – Restaurant

From Cornavin train station: bus 8 (direction OMS or Appia), Appia bus stop

Access for disabled

Visits

Guided tours for groups

Information and reservation: tel. +41 22 748 95 06

Schools

Teaching material: www.micr.org/edu

Information and reservation: tel. +41 22 748 95 06

Free guided tours (no booking required)

Sunday, 14 October, 4 November, 2 December 2007 and 13 January 2008

In English at 11 a.m.

In French at 2.30 p.m.

Lectures (in French)

“A theme, an organization”

Thursday mornings at 11 a.m. at the Museum

For individuals and groups with reservations: visit@micr.org or +41 22 748 95 06

11 October 2007

Climate change: a new humanitarian challenge

Red Cross/Red Crescent Climate Centre

18 October 2007

The day after. The first few hours after disaster strikes.

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

1 November 2007

What happens to the money I donated?

Chaîne du Bonheur

8 November 2007

I work for ...

Doctors without Borders

15 November 2007

Natural disaster and food insecurity.

World Food Programme

13 December 2007

When disaster strikes near home.

Civil defence



10 January 2008

Rebuilding, the right way.
Care International

17 January 2008

Organizing the organizations.
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

24 January 2008

Disaster in the midst of conflict.
ICRC

For more detailed information on the events organized in connection with the exhibition, visit our website: www.micr.org