Relief groups respond to Iran quake losses: Generous international aid needed

News in the January 27, 2004 issue

Pope John Paul II called for generous international aid to “our Iranian brothers and sisters” even as a range of religious relief organizations began to respond to an earthquake that claimed more than 25,000 lives in the ancient city of Bam in southeastern Iran.

Speaking from his Vatican study window two days after the December 26 temblor, the Catholic pontiff asked pilgrims to pray for the victims. “May the solidarity of the entire world, particularly felt in the Christmas climate, render their situation less dramatic,” the pope said.

Lutheran World Relief (LWR), based in Baltimore, allocated on December 29 an initial cash response of $25,000 to aid survivors. A staffer for World Vision, an evangelical Christian humanitarian organization, said the agency planned to deliver $220,000 worth of relief materials during the last week of December.

LWR and Church World Service said they would work through the Middle East Council of Churches. Church World Service has an emergency grant of $30,000 to purchase and distribute materials for emergency shelter. U.S.-based Presbyterian Disaster Assistance committed an initial $150,000 in emergency relief. Christian Reformed World Relief Committee will work with the Iranian Council of Churches to identify needs and distribute food.

Various U.S.-based Islamic groups urged Muslims to support emergency relief in the region where as many as 80 percent of the buildings crumbled or suffered massive damage. –*Religion News Service*