

Remarks to American Participants in the Armenian Earthquake Rescue Efforts

December 22, 1988

Over the last 2 weeks, the hearts of the American people have gone out to the people of Armenia as they grappled with the earthquake disaster and its aftermath. The world wept at the terrible magnitude of the destruction and the tremendous loss of life: whole villages and cities virtually leveled. Great numbers of men, women, and children were trapped beneath fallen buildings in one of the worst earthquake disasters ever to occur. Tens of thousands were killed, countless numbers injured, and many others tragically missing.

But no sooner had we learned of the disaster and of the great need that existed than you and so many other Americans organized to help. Rescue workers and medical teams from across the country flew to the Soviet Union where you searched for the living and gave care to those who were injured. And thanks to your immediate response and special skills, precious lives were saved.

Here in Washington, the people in AID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance worked around the clock to coordinate the effort. And thanks to people from this country and from throughout the international community, direct assistance and desperately needed supplies were able to reach the survivors. And throughout this period, American relief organizations, churches, and the American-Armenian community have produced a great humanitarian response, which continues providing all forms of material assistance to that devastated area.

Ladies and gentlemen, thanks to people like you here today, the Armenians have not had to face this tragedy alone. And for that I want to personally thank you on behalf of every American. Those of you who answered the appeal for help, who have assisted in the relief effort, and those who flew to the Soviet Union and sifted through the rubble, searching for life against all odds, carried with you a message from America. It was a message of peace. You conveyed what was truly a universal message, one for us all to remember at this time of year: that every life is infinitely precious, a gift from God. So, whatever language we speak, whatever country we may live in, whatever our race or religious faith, we're all one people on this Earth. And in times of suffering, in the face of natural disaster, we're drawn by our common humanity to help one another, to join in a great brotherhood of man.

The lesson for this season is for us to love one another, and that's something you have shown in a very real and important way. So, for this let me say: Thank you, and God bless you all.

Note: The President spoke at 11:52 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.