

Press Release

The Hague, 27 September 2004

Prince Claus Fund for
Culture and Development

CLTURAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Cultural emergency relief in North Morocco marks the first anniversary of Cultural Emergency Response.

On 24 September 2004, Cultural Emergency Response gave the people of Mestassa (North Morocco) 25,000 euro to restore and maintain their 14th century mosque as the centre of village life. The earthquake of 24 February this year destroyed the homes of many who had re-migrated from the Netherlands. The mosque remained standing, but the structure of the building was damaged and its stability threatened.

26 September marks the first anniversary of Cultural Emergency Response (CER). Donations made this year include 25,000 euro for the reconstruction of one of the reading rooms of the university library of Baghdad that was plundered and set alight after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in April 2003. CER similarly provided 25,000 euro for the restoration of the archive of the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization that suffered extensive damage as a result of the earthquake last year in Bam.

Mestassa, Morocco, restoration of 14th century mosque

The people of Mestassa received financial aid from CER to restore its mosque. Mestassa is 70 kilometres from Al-Hoceima, North Morocco. The mosque dates from the Merinids Era (1244-1465). The building is a popular version of the architectural style of this Berber dynasty. While the houses of many re-migrants from the Netherlands proved unable to hold out against the earthquake of 24 February 2004, the old mosque remained standing. It was well built, using construction techniques that helped it resist nature's violent forces. Nonetheless, the fabric of the building was cracked, which jeopardised the mosque's stability and future. Therefore the outer wall is being reinforced; the exterior, including the garden and entrance, are being reconstructed. The drainage system, the well, and the chimney at the entrance will be repaired and the entire building will be given a fresh coat of whitewash. The work was done to preserve the mosque of Mestassa as a model for sustainable building in North Morocco, and as a safe social centre and school.

A year of Cultural Emergency Response

On 26 September it will be one year since Cultural Emergency Response was founded by the Prince Claus Fund and the International Committee of the Blue Shield. CER offers emergency aid in the event of damage to, or destruction of, cultural property arising from man-made or natural disaster. Conflict and natural disasters damage and destroy not only human lives but also the world's contemporary and historic cultural heritages. When cultural heritage is destroyed, people suffer a fundamental loss, one that is not always sufficiently recognised. By a timely response, the Cultural Emergency Response aims to make a difference.

The Prince Claus Fund is a platform for intercultural exchange. It works jointly with individuals and organisations in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, on the realisation of activities and publications reflecting a contemporary approach to the themes of culture and development. The Prince Claus Awards form a part of this policy.

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The International Committee of
the Blue Shield (ICBS)

Comité International du
Bouclier Bleu (CIBB)

Baghdad, Iraq, rebuilding the university library

When CER was founded, the library of the University of Baghdad received 25,000 euro to reconstruct the reading room on the university site Al-Waziriye. After the fall of the regime of Saddam Hussein in April 2003, libraries were plundered and set on fire. UNESCO calls the loss of books and with that, the ability to consult them and contemplate their contents, a catastrophe. The funds provided by the Cultural Emergency Response have since gone towards buying computers and airconditioning units to cope with the terrible heat of Baghdad, that is affecting both people and books. Limited facilities will be available to the students again from the autumn of 2004 onwards. Once the university has rebuilt the building, the amenities will be expanded to include photocopiers and computers to go with the tables and chairs bought by the library itself.

Bam, Iran, reconstruction of the documentation centre

More than 2000 years old, the citadel of Bam in the South of Iran is the largest earthen construction in the world. On 26 December 2003, the oasis city was badly hit by an earthquake. The Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization has a documentation centre on the citadel. With 25,000 euro from CER this organisation is able to reinstate its archive. It is saving parts of its own archive, consisting of many thousands of documents; gathering existing records and documents from elsewhere on the period prior to the earthquake (aerial photos, photos, maps) and is building up a new archive documenting the situation after the earthquake. The Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization considers the latter of great importance because it offers a basis for the restoration work. Moreover, some construction and restoration techniques were better able to withstand the earthquake than others; the Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization aims to improve knowledge of earth construction in earthquake areas by a closer study of these techniques.

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