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Pope Francis stands outside an ambulance with an older white man in a puffy jacket

Pope Francis talks with Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner, during the blessing of an ambulance to donate to the Ukrainian city of Lviv, at the Vatican in this file photo from March 26, 2022. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)



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Pope Francis sent 10,000 thermal shirts to earthquake victims in Turkey and Syria, where millions are sleeping outdoors in below-freezing temperatures.

Two 7.8 and 7.5 magnitude earthquakes devastated the region Feb. 6, killing more than 40,000, according to figures released Feb. 15.

According to the Vatican, the winter clothing was personally transported to the port of Naples, some 115 miles south of Rome, by Cardinal Konrad Krajewski, the papal almoner, Feb. 14.

The shirts were scheduled to arrive in Turkey Feb. 17 and be delivered to the Kilis refugee camp in southern Turkey, which has hosted refugees fleeing the civil war in Syria since 2012 and currently holds some 60,000 people.

The Vatican said Francis also sent an undisclosed amount of financial aid to the apostolic nunciature in Syria to support the Syrian people "already exhausted by so many years of war and now by the devastating earthquake."

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Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay said that over 1 million people in Turkey are living in temporary housing facilities, such as tents and shipping containers, as of Feb. 11. The UN refugee agency, UNHCR, estimated that as many as 5.3 million people could be left homeless in Syria as a result of the earthquakes. In February, nighttime temperatures in the region consistently fall below 30 degrees Fahrenheit.

The Turkish government received criticism for its response to the disaster after backups on roads and airports made it difficult for international aid to reach its destinations. In Syria, the ongoing civil war blocked aid from reaching opposition-held territories immediately following the earthquakes.

The distribution of the thermal shirts will be organized by the Rava Foundation, a charity that supports vulnerable children worldwide.

In December, the Dicastery for the Service of Charity organized a drive to collect thermal shirts for people in Ukraine without electricity during the Christmas season. The Vatican said Krajewski brought the shirts, along with 40 generators, to Ukraine in the days leading up to Christmas.