

Quake appeals launched

Wellington, NZPA

Several appeals have been launched to help Cantabrians following yesterday's devastating earthquake.

ANZ launched an appeal and announced it would make the first donation, \$1 million, and Westpac has donated \$1 million to a Salvation Army appeal. BNZ has also pledged \$1m.

The Salvation Army re-launched its Canterbury Earthquake Appeal, with national fund raising coordinator Major Robbie Ross saying a tremendous effort was required to help those already living with the hardships and psychological effects of the original quake and its aftershocks.

"Our experience with the September quake showed us the great emotional shock such an event can have on people - and now there is the added dimension of some people grieving for loved ones," he said.

"There will be myriad material needs by those who have lost possessions and homes. We are appealing for cash donations to strengthen our response."

The Salvation Army also asked its members to pray for the people of Canterbury.

Anyone wanting to donate to The Salvation Army appeal could call 0800 53 00 00 or do it online at www.salvationarmy.org.nz or to Westpac account 03 0207 0617331 00.

"Our thoughts are with the people affected by today's earthquake, our staff in the regions and their families who have been affected by today's earthquake," ANZ New Zealand chief executive David Hisco said.

"It is terrible that they have had to go through another natural disaster and of such devastating scale just as Christchurch was attempting to rebuild and move on from the September earthquake."

Westpac New Zealand chief executive George Frazis said the thoughts and support of the bank and its staff nationwide were with them.

"We particularly give our condolences to those families who have lost loved ones."

BNZ chief executive Andrew Thorburn said his bank would be doing everything it could to support those who were suffering.

The Auckland University Students' Association was first off the mark, launching an immediate street appeal to raise money for the people of Christchurch affected by the quake.

"No words can express the horror of the scenes we have seen coming in from Christchurch," association president Joe McCrory said.

"Thoughts of every University of Auckland student are with the people of Christchurch, their families and friends," he said.

Anyone wanting to make a donation should contact the association on (09) 309 0789, or make a donation in person around the Student Union Building on the University of Auckland campus.

Meanwhile, Pike River Disaster Relief Trust chairman and Greymouth mayor Tony Kokshoorn announced the trust would no longer accept donations for the November mining disaster, which claimed 19 lives, and instead urged people to donate to the Christchurch earthquake appeals.

Flights to return to normal

Wellington, Feb 23 NZPA

Flights were expected to return to normal today after yesterday's devastating 6.3 magnitude quake in Christchurch severely disrupted travels plans around the country.

Christchurch Airport spokeswoman Monique Oomen yesterday told NZPA the domestic and international terminals had both suffered some damage and needed to be checked before flights opened again.

Tourists and visitors to Christchurch who spent the night in the city's Hagley Park were the first to leave on two special flights to Auckland and Wellington this morning.

Normal domestic flights were due to resume from 8am.

A decision on the resumption of international flights was due to be made at 10am.

A spokeswoman for Wellington Airport said most planes were now running to schedule.

All flights were halted immediately after the quake but apart from Christchurch resumed about 90 minutes later.

Auckland Airport spokesman Richard Llewellyn said the national air traffic control centre was in Christchurch, and while it was being checked all planes were grounded.

He was unsure how many passengers had been affected.

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Cramner courts after earthquake. (Photo - NZPA / Pam Johnson)

Massive economic implications

Wellington, Feb 23 NZPA

Canterbury's devastating earthquake has massive economic implications for the region and the rest of the country, leading economists say.

However, trying to estimate the economic impact of yesterday's 6.3 magnitude quake at this stage was foolish, BNZ head of research Stephen Toplis said.

"The biggest disservice you can do anybody at the moment is make a stupid estimate of the dollar value of this."

"We're no better placed than anybody else to try and quantify the magnitude," he told NZPA.

However, the economic toll would be far bigger than the impact of September's magnitude 7.1 quake.

"How many businesses in Christchurch, that were just about to get back on their feet again, have now suffered an impact that, in some cases, could be fatal?"

This time, there was also a more severe psychological impact, due to the rising death and injury toll, on top of the more tangible economic implications.

Mr Toplis said the region's full recovery would take years if not decades.

"It has massive implications for the psychology of the place and the economy and we just don't know what it means in a number sense," he said.

Christchurch represented about 15 percent of the nation's economy.

"So, we do know from a numerical sense that 15 percent of the New Zealand economy has now stopped," he said.

Due to New Zealand's small size, the whole country would be affected.

"You're going to have businesses that supply to Christchurch and are supplied by Christchurch, there will be downstream effects there," he said.

Before the latest quake and aftershocks, Christchurch's economy had been fairly diverse with a range of industries including manufacturing, the service sector and agriculture.

Mr Toplis was confident Christchurch's economy would eventually recover and used the example of Kobe, in Japan, which was devastated by a magnitude 6.8 quake in 1995, but was now back up and running.

That quake was estimated to have caused about

ten trillion yen in damage or 2.5 percent of Japan's gross domestic product at the time.

ASB chief economist Nick Tuffley told NZPA tourism would also take a big hit, as Christchurch was the gateway to the South Island, with the second biggest international airport in the country.

A second large quake, particularly where people had died including foreign nationals, would undoubtedly make tourists wary.

The Rugby World Cup would have given the region's economy a much-needed boost but whether games would still be held in the city was up in the air.

Damage to commercial buildings and infrastructure including roads, bridges and tunnels was far worse this time.

The Port of Lyttelton was a key pipeline for goods in and out of the Canterbury region and the big question was when that could become operational again, he said.

There was about a 25 percent probability the Reserve Bank would cut the official cash rate, to control the ripple effects in the wider economy, he said.

"It's a possibility but what's more certain is that it

will be a lot longer before the Reserve Bank will be contemplating lifting rates back up, cut or no cut."

Fletcher Building's chief executive of infrastructure, Mark Binns, said the company was liaising with the Earthquake Commission and putting together a response team.

Yesterday's earthquake meant earthquake repair and assessment work, following the September 4 quake and aftershocks, would return to square one.

Fletcher would need resources from other parts of the country and possibly off-shore to reevaluate claims and assess damage, he said.

Meanwhile, the Canterbury Employers Chamber of Commerce, Peter Townsend, urged business owners to stay away from the city centre as now was not the time to check quake damage.

The devastation was incredible and the central city was a disaster area, he said.

However, the main arterial routes were still accessible and the key focus was to get water, food and power to people.

"This is a national emergency - no doubt at all," he said.

Hundreds of doctors in city as quake hit

Sydney, NZPA/AAP

Hundreds of doctors from around the world were gathered in Christchurch for a conference when yesterday's devastating quake struck, and some offered to help the injured.

More than 600 delegates, including 439 Australians, were at a urology conference at the Christchurch Convention Centre when the magnitude 6.3 quake struck.

All were evacuated from the centre and were reportedly safe, a notice on the website of the Urological Society of Australia and New Zealand said.

Young Melbourne doctor Marni Basto, who escaped uninjured, said she had begun gathering supplies to help the injured.

"We're just waiting for them to clear that there's any structural damage that would put us at harm, and then we'll try to head back in and try to help some people," she said.

"For the time being we're just trying to accumulate whatever supplies we can."

"We've taken some from the stores around and everyone's been very helpful giving us whatever they can."

Urological Society president David Malouf said the quake felt like a wrecking ball was being smashed into the side of the building as the ground shook for between 45 seconds and a minute.

"The noise was incredible," Dr Malouf told AAP.

"I don't understand what made that noise but it

was like a jet engine outside.

"The whole building started to shake, violently shaking to the point where, if you were trying to stand up, you would fall over."

The doctors made their way to the foyer of the Crowne Plaza hotel, attached to the convention centre, which was covered in glass and pieces of the ceiling, before they walked through the shattered front windows and onto the street.

"There were just people slowly filing out of buildings with this sort of look of bewilderment on their face," he said.

"People were very distressed."

"What was really quite disturbing was water coming out of the ground. Lakes were just appearing in the middle of the street."

Dr Malouf said there were cracks in buildings and fissures opening up in the roads, while trees had been ripped out of the ground.

Dr Malouf said the doctors' belongings remained in hotels, including money and passports, but they could not retrieve them until engineers assessed the buildings.

He appealed to Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard to get her and his fellow Australian delegates back to their homes.

"We don't need to be here. We're tourists in a city which has been hit by a disaster and we're 300 people that the Kiwis shouldn't really have to look after," he said.

Queen sends message of condolence

Wellington, NZPA

Queen Elizabeth II has sent a message of condolence to Prime Minister John Key, following the Christchurch earthquake.

"I have been utterly shocked by the news of another earthquake in Christchurch. Please convey my deep sympathy to the families and friends

of those who have been killed; my thoughts are with all those who have been affected by this dreadful event," she said in a statement on her website.

"My thoughts are also with the emergency services and everyone who is assisting in the rescue efforts."



Hotel Stonehurst backpackers hotel lies wrecked in the inner city. (Photo - NZPA / David Wethey)

Emergency cash grants for victims

Christchurch, Feb 23 NZPA

Christchurch Mayor Bob Parker says emergency cash grants will be made available for victims of yesterday's quake.

"We know that some people just can't get money and money is what you need at the moment, in a number of cases, to keep your life ticking over," he said this morning.

"We've taken steps there and we'll be updating... with the location and time at which we will make those emergency funds available for special situations."

Mr Parker said he visited a site in the city this morning where it had been several hours since anyone had been pulled alive from the wreckage.

"But our approach is that there are people alive and still trapped in that rubble," he said.

"This morning all our effort is focused on finding our people and getting them out of those buildings."

Mr Parker earlier said people needed to steel themselves for more heartbreak as rescuers continued to

bring people, alive and dead, out of buildings shattered in yesterday's earthquake.

Christchurch had just been fighting its way back from the 7.1 earthquake last September.

"We have gone backwards, six months of planning and work wiped out in a few seconds - we need to come to terms with that today, it's a huge blow to the city."

Mr Parker said like everyone else, he spent much of yesterday trying to find out where his parents were.

"But everyone is now accounted for and that's a huge weight off."

He said the message to those families with people missing was that everything was being done to help and to find their relatives and friends.

"We are getting people out alive so keep your hope up but it is going to be a hard day and I think as the news begins to unfold today we will have a clearer picture and it is not going to be a happy picture."