



Pakistan has its first mountain rescue: the Concordia Rescue Team

Press Release

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ISLAMABAD, Pakistan – A mountain rescue service is finally born in Pakistan. Its name is "Concordia Rescue Team," and it's made up entirely by qualified Pakistani staff. The "base camp" is on the Concordia Glacier, at the foot of K2, and the equipment of the team includes a hyperbaric chamber, oxygen bottles and first aid materials for high altitude diseases. The Concordia Rescue Team came on duty two months ago and has already provided assistance to over 200 people, undertaking rescue operations on K2, Broad Peak and Gasherbrum. The initiative has been promoted by the Seed project born in the framework of Pakistan-Italian debt for development SWAP agreement (PIDSA) and coordinated by the Italian EvK2Cnr Committee and the Karakorum International University.

The Concordia Rescue Team is something completely new in Pakistan. An organized mountain rescue service had never existed among these mountains, except for temporary initiatives, carried out by foreign organizations. A few years ago, Pakistani people were used to work only as porters for trekking or mountaineering expeditions, and their skills were inadequate in case of emergencies at high altitude like the tragic avalanche on K2 in 2008.

Today the situation has radically changed: a mountain rescue team, entirely composed by Pakistani staff, started working on the Concordia glacier two months ago. The team is made by mountain rescue technicians and paramedics, all experienced, acclimatized and specifically trained. They provide assistance to porters, trekkers and climbers.

"The goal is creating an emergency service working every year at Concordia - explains Maurizio Gallo, technical manager of the Seed Project in Pakistan – providing assistance to the people visiting the Baltoro glacier. Last year we trained 15 high altitude porters for mountain rescue on rock and ice, and in October there will be another rescue training course. Technicians and paramedics also received medical training for first aid at the Skardu hospital. For the future, we are working to start cooperation with the emergency service 1122 of Skardu, and with the helicopter service, managed by the Pakistani Army".

The "Concordia rescue team" is an emergency service with two tasks: the first is helping in case of accidents on the mountains and maintaining safe the trekking routes on the glacier, the second is providing medical assistance to tourists, climbers and porters. Such a service was of primary importance among these mountains, where touristic flows are increasing: according to statistics, every year 60 trekkings and dozens of expeditions visit Baltoro. There are about 6000 people moving on the Baltoro glacier in the summer.

"Feedbacks have been enthusiastic so far - says Gallo – both from locals and tour operators. But the nicest thing is the reaction of the rescuers: they feel important and work hard to fulfill their task. This kind of feelings can change their approach to the mountains and mountaineering, making Balti people become professional guides and not just porters".

The Concordia rescue team is an initiative of the Seed project promoted by EvK2Cnr, like the Keep Karakorum Clean expeditions. In summer 2012, a new cleaning campaign will be done on the Karakorum

glaciers: separate collection of waste will be introduced for expeditions and trekkings and new toilets will be installed at the K2 base camp.

"Thanks to this operation every campsite in the Central Karakorum National Park will have its toilets like two 8000ers base camps – Gallo explains -. We will also introduce the use of special biodegradable bags that allow easy transportation and effective burial of human waste".

The goal of the Seed Project - Social Economic Environment Development in the Central Karakorum National Park (CKNP) - is to transfer the management of these activities to the staff of the Central Karakoram National Park in the near future. "All these initiatives must be done by them for their mountains" says Gallo.

To date, EvK2Cnr has promoted with the support and collaboration of the Alpine Club of Pakistan, 4 cleaning expeditions on the Karakorum glaciers within the projects Seed and Karakorum Trust, collecting 30 tons of waste, installing 10 toilets on the glacier, training 60 high altitude porters (15 specialized in mountain rescue) and 200 trekking guides.

Pictures and video available on the following FTP

Indirizzo: [ftp.montagna.tv](ftp://montagna.tv)

User: montagnatv_rescueteam

Password: rescueteam

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