On 12 May 2008, the world was shaken by news of a deadly earthquake that had struck Sichuan province in China. The entire province was immediately declared a disaster zone. Thousands of lives were lost, while many more were missing, injured or buried.

Motorola employees in China and around the world jumped into the thick of the disaster relief effort by mobilizing resources, donations, assistance and equipment to the Chengdu Government authorities and relief agencies such as the China Red Cross in the rescue mission.

Galvanizing into Action
The emergency communications relief experience from Hurricane Katrina and the Asian Tsunami prepared Motorola to manage a crisis of such scale. As a company, Motorola was able to activate the right resources and equipment, as well as deploy the appropriate field support for the quick recovery of base stations and communications infrastructure for emergency relief communications.

Upon learning of the disaster, Motorola immediately evacuated more than 400 of its staff at the Chengdu branch and mobilized resources to offer the desperately needed communications support. Emergency communications systems and radio equipment were also rushed down to Sichuan’s earthquake-hit areas. The local team worked closely with the Sichuan provincial government authorities and major mobile operators to ensure that communications channels were up and running, as it was critical to the search and rescue work.

After the first batch of emergency relief communications system was dispatched, engineers like Liang Wei, despite lingering dangers, remained onsite to extend assistance to the emergency rescue team on the ground, whilst ensuring that the communications network remained operational throughout the rescue efforts.

Unwavering Support
Greg Brown, President & Co-CEO of Motorola also appealed to the global Motorola family to do its bit for the disaster victims. Response to the donation drive was overwhelming as employees voluntarily donated blood and torches, amongst other necessities. A voluntary counseling team was also established for victims of the quake.

CEO of Motorola (China) Electronics Ltd, Kao Ruey Bin, was also at the scene with the Motorola team and several senior officers from the Chengdu Information Office to devise quick recovery action plans, and escalated deployment of resources and equipment to people on the ground.
Restoring Communications to the Disaster Zone

The earthquake had caused major interruptions to the public communication networks. Two-way radio communications such as TETRA (TErrestrial Trunked Radio) digital trunking radio system and conventional two-way radios became the sole communication lifeline to commanders, military soldiers, policemen and public security officers as they searched for survivors.

Motorola’s TETRA system deployed by the Chengdu government in 2004 was put to the test. It became a critical communications backbone. The co-ordination of emergency rescue teams, 120 relief centers, local hospitals, public security bureaus, and city government depended heavily on the network to administer rescue operations.

One of Motorola’s TETRA base stations residing at the Sichuan Emergency Command Centre was so hardy it withstood the impact from the quake.

Several of Motorola’s rapid deployable TETRA base stations were also deployed at the Emergency Rescue Frontline Command Centre in Dujiangyan. Linked via an ad-hoc mobile broadband, the system at Dujiangyan was able to connect to the Emergency Command Centres in Chengdu, within a day. This allowed rescue operations and deployment of resources to be extended even in highly remote areas whilst ensuring constant communications with the Command Centre.

Display of Great Humanitarian Spirit

The Chengdu Mayor, Ge Honglin, applauded Motorola’s relentless support response to the rescue team quake.

In addition, the First Research Institute of China’s Ministry of Public Security publicly commended Motorola’s corporate social responsibility that “Motorola reacted in the shortest possible time by manufacturing and supplying the badly needed radios equipment and base stations to ensure smooth public safety critical communications.”

Preparing for the Future

The Mayor and the leaders at Chengdu Information Office stressed the importance of Emergency Command and Communication system. The Sichuan incident has prompted concerned government authorities to re-evaluate, expand and enhance its current system so as to be well-prepared for the future.