

**NASUH MAHRUKI**

Turkey

Citizen/Community

Participation

Nasuh Mahruki draws on his experience in outdoor search and rescue to orchestrate locally-managed volunteer response teams to address natural disasters in Turkey and abroad. His programs save lives in times of crisis and at the same time foster volunteerism and community responsibility.

**THE NEW IDEA**

Nasuh builds a network of locally-based volunteer search and rescue teams to enable effective responses to natural disasters and other life-threatening emergencies while promoting volunteerism, leadership, and civic initiative. Nasuh's network trains citizens throughout the country in skills such as first-aid and trauma care, and helps volunteers organize into disciplined teams with clearly defined roles for each participant, and prepares team members for the ethical dimensions of crisis management. He pushes his volunteers toward the deep realization that ordinary people can and must take ownership of their safety in crisis situations. He leverages his teams through outreach to schools, workplaces, and community centers to encourage citizens to volunteer in needy neighborhoods throughout Turkey. By focusing on safety, an issue that is critical to men and women of all backgrounds, Nasuh positions himself to make a broad change in public conceptions about the roles and responsibilities of citizenship.

**THE PROBLEM**

On August 17, 1999, a massive earthquake shook Izmit, a city of some 12 million people located an hour's drive southeast from Istanbul. Almost 18,000 people died, and many hundreds more were trapped beneath collapsed buildings. Only three months later, a smaller quake caused another nine hundred deaths in Duzce, a densely populated region on Turkey's western coast.

While these quakes were exceptionally devastating, smaller quakes routinely shake towns and cities along Turkey's eastern coast and catch communities off-guard, causing property damage and needlessly taking lives. Each year, an estimated one thousand people die from earthquakes in Turkey and seven thousand buildings collapse, often trapping people alive under the rubble. Nor is the risk confined to 1 region of the country; 95 percent of Turkey's 65 million people are located in earthquake zones, as are 98 percent of industrial areas and 93 percent of dams. Neighboring countries face a similarly high level of threat.

While natural disasters pose a real and regular danger in the region, crisis response plans have repeatedly failed to deliver help and resources in time to save lives. The national army dispatches rescue teams, but typically the soldiers are too few and too late, arriving after the critical three-day period when life-saving is possible. Furthermore, the nature of the response and the tasks of the responder—freeing people from the rubble of collapsed buildings, dressing wounds, calming terrified children—require a familiarity with the immediate physical area and the people who live in it. Only local citizens possess such familiarity, but so far response plans have rarely involved these citizens in relief.

Even in the instances where the response to crises is rooted locally, volunteers have not until now played a critical role. In Turkey, volunteerism is associated with poorly-managed projects that are charity-based, being provided by one group for the benefit of, or in charity to, another. Initiatives such as rural volunteer-run fire departments do not exist here, and men and women do not see it as their role to provide for their safety or the safety of their neighbor. Instead, they look to the Army or to paid civil servants and as such they are less likely to consider starting or participating in something that is citizen-led and principally volunteer.

**THE STRATEGY**

Nasuh forms specialized teams of search and rescue volunteer "professionals" that emphasize discipline, efficient management, and mutual support. He works with national and local governments to carry out successful rescue and teaches the public to be informed citizens, able and willing to come to their neighbor's aid in time of need.

Nasuh founded the organization AKUT to coordinate his rescue teams and attendant outreach work. The group currently supports teams in six cities, each with a specialty in earthquake rescue, mountain rescue, or another field. Teams are scaled to meet the needs of their communities: in Istanbul, the volunteer force is four hundred, while more rural areas maintain forces of a few dozen. Wherever volunteers operate, AKUT selects and trains them to work together seamlessly. Nasuh earns a solid reputation and public trust through rigorous training and high standards of performance. In 1999, a national survey named AKUT the most dependable organization in the country, outranking the Turkish Army, which had held first place for decades.

Partnering with local authorities is a key strategy in the work of AKUT, which lives by the slogan: "We need your help to help you." For example, the AKUT team in Bingel partners with the first responder system in their remote, mountainous region where ambulances have difficulty reaching many households. When publicly-funded dispatch system confirms an emergency in the region, first responder teams summon AKUT to assist with off-road rescues. AKUT teams bring victims safely to the road, where an ambulance can collect and deliver them to the hospital. Their efforts reflect AKUT's pragmatic and selfless philosophy. Nasuh positions his organization not to steal the show but rather to cooperate with and reform existing structures to better save lives.

AKUT has conducted 140 search and rescue operations since its founding in 1996. As a member of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group, its teams are prepared to take on

international missions at any time. They have participated in rescue efforts for earthquake victims in Greece, Taiwan, and India; and they have helped flood victims in Mozambique. Nasuh sees these international efforts as an opportunity to lay the foundation for peaceful exchange between countries. Following a 1999 earthquake, Nasuh led an AKUT team to Greece, a country that has historically clashed with Turkey. Following the operation, the President of Greece publicly thanked the volunteers and awarded them with honors, recognizing them as builders of peace between the two nations.

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Reaching the general public with information on first aid and crisis response is another core AKUT program. Its volunteers have offered over 1,500 seminars, usually 3 hour introductions to general safety. They offer other workshops in rope rescue, first aid, and FEMA protocol, and have begun to train Army staff and police teams as well.

Nasuh makes sure that his volunteers stay on top of global advances in search and rescue, and helps them spread those advances far and wide. For example, AKUT sent an engineer to New York City after the attacks of 2001 to record techniques for use in future disasters. The engineer then wrote a Turkish-language book on the subject and now contributes to seminars and workshops for the public and for experts such as engineers and architects.

Nasuh's priorities for the future include fortifying the Young AKUT program, a new initiative that identifies and trains children who show promise as future leaders. The program involves them in AKUT to strengthen their leadership skills and foster their commitment to public welfare and safety. He is also organizing a public outreach effort in which AKUT volunteers will conduct a four-month tour of 81 cities, reaching out to a million people throughout Turkey with slides shows, seminars, and written resources.

Nasuh spreads carefully and slowly to insure quality and maintain his organization's high standards. Five additional branches have emerged since the founding of AKUT, created in the mold of the original: semi-autonomous units specializing in rescue that makes sense for the region. While Nasuh guards the AKUT brand with care, he shares the ideas, information, and methods behind his organization freely, and has inspired several hundred volunteer search-and-rescue efforts across Turkey.

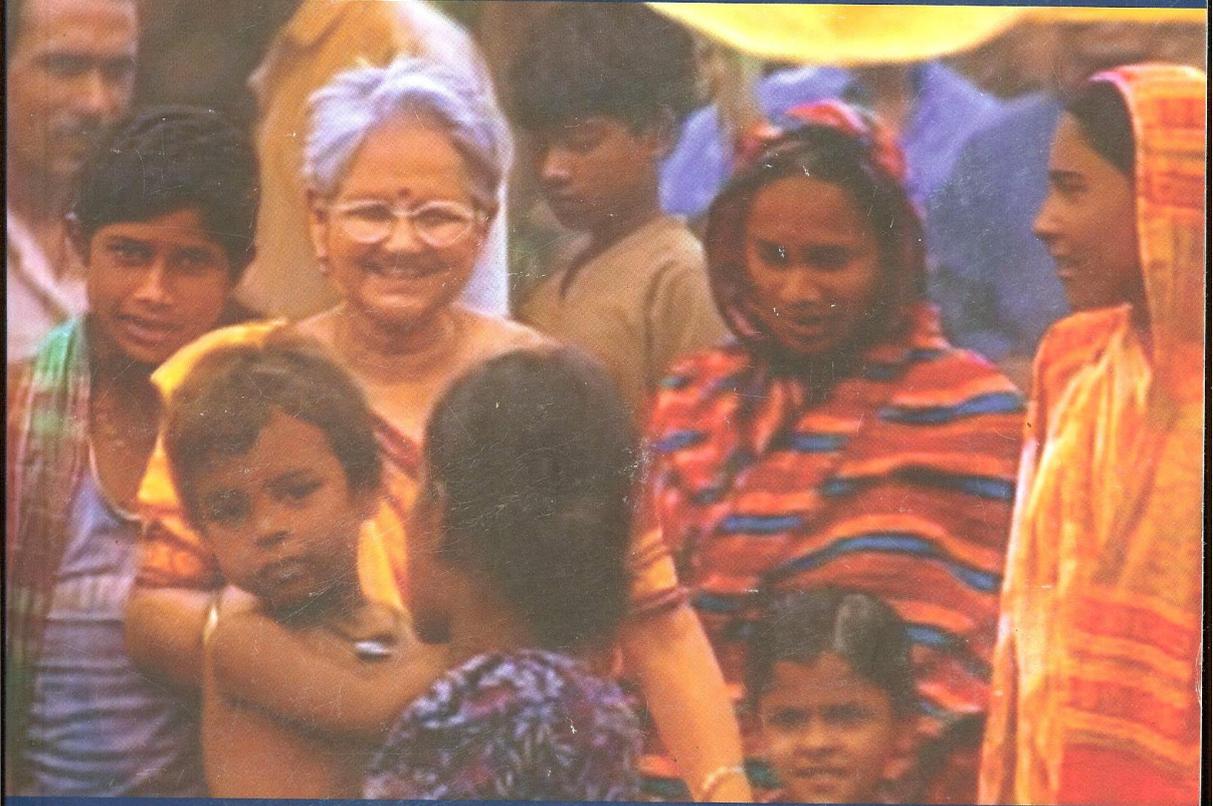
**THE PERSON**

Born in 1968 in Istanbul, Nasuh grew up with his father, who had a small business selling car parts. While a university student in Ankara, Nasuh took up mountaineering, which became his life's passion. He also helped to found an outdoor sports organization

at college, eventually running the group for three years. During his tenure, the group organized outdoor trips and started the first Turkish-language magazine for outdoor sports enthusiasts. Nasuh taught cycling, paragliding, scuba diving, and mountaineering to newcomers, seeing again and again the personal transformation that can result from learning a new skill. He and his peers gained self-confidence, learned to work together in teams, and took responsibility for their safety and the safety of others.

Three summers spent with Russian climbers in Kazakhstan greatly influenced Nasuh as a climber and as a leader. Serious climbing helped him to develop a deep understanding of mountaineering, along with determination and the ability to take controlled risks. It gave him an education in human behavior at the edges of endurance, when the smallest decision may prove fatal or life-saving. A disciplined, high-performing athlete in his own right, Nasuh went on to climb Turkey's highest peaks and many of the Himalayan Mountains in South Asia. Then, in a worldwide effort financed by corporate sponsors, he completed the "Seven Peaks" project, climbing the highest mountain of each continent. He was the forty-fourth climber to finish—and the youngest.

From these experiences, Nasuh learned the terrain and climate of foreign lands, and gained an appreciation for new cultures. He endured the toughest of challenges, and lost friends to storms and avalanches. Following a failed attempt in 1994 to find two lost climbers, Nasuh and ten friends brainstormed for months on how to prevent a similar situation in the future. Their discussions gave birth two years later to AKUT. Initially designed for mountaineering search and rescue, AKUT became well-known for its rapid, organized response to the Izmit quake in 1999, an effort that saved many hundreds of lives and showed that AKUT's disciplined approach to citizen volunteering was effective across a broad range of terrains.



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