

US disaster group opens camp hospital in Italy's north

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A US disaster relief group opened a field hospital on Friday in Italy's north, as the country's coronavirus death toll showed no sign of tailing off.

Samaritan's Purse, a Christian disaster response group based in North Carolina, began setting up the respiratory care unit in Cremona, about 90 kilometres (60 miles) southeast of Milan, and expected to receive its first patients later Friday.

The unit, located in the [parking lot](#) across from the city [hospital](#), provides eight intensive care unit beds equipped with ventilators, 20 beds for general care, a laboratory and pharmacy, and is set to expand over the weekend.

"We came here because our fellow brothers and sisters, our Italian brothers and sisters, are hurting," said Kelly Suter, health director of the new hospital.

The Lombardy region's top health official, Giulio Gallera, said the new hospital would provide sorely needed help for the overloaded Cremona hospital, which like others in Italy's north are struggling to keep up with the constant inflow of patients suffering from respiratory failure from the virus.

But the new unit "also has a symbolic value," Gallera added.

"Women and men who come to the other side of the world to help us and work with us to defeat the coronavirus - it's wonderful."

On Friday, members of the team, soldiers and volunteers from Italy's civil protection unit readied the camp, unloading boxes within the white tents and setting up equipment. Some in white protective suits disinfected the area, while military trucks unloaded supplies.

A second airlift is planned for Saturday to expand the camp into 14 tents, with a total of 68 beds. Samaritan's Purse said that it would have nearly 70 doctors, nurses, technicians, and other specialists working at the weekend.

Italy's overwhelmed hospitals in the north, the centre of the country's outbreak, are scrambling for more doctors and nurses to care for coronavirus cases and face a shortage of ventilators.

On Friday, Italy's civil protection unit announced another 627 deaths from the [coronavirus](#), a new record. That figure included 381 deaths within the Lombardy region, where Cremona is located.

In the past year, Samaritan's Purse has sent disaster relief teams to major global disasters, including the ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cyclone Idai in Mozambique, and Hurricane Dorian, in the Bahamas, the group said.

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