

## Life-saving ships for Turkey's earthquake victims



On the anniversary of the 2023 earthquake in Turkey, Karpowership reflects on the events that shook the nation and how their accommodation barges, also called life ships, helped thousands.

On 6 February, it was exactly one year since one of the biggest

earthquakes to hit Turkey devastated the landscape and the people who live there. Measuring 7.8 on the Richter Scale, it caused a massive shift in tectonic plates, significant damage to buildings and roads and sadly took the lives of more than 50,000 people.

It was the day after the earthquake that Karpowership, a Turkish-based owner and operator of floating power plants, assembled their team in the War Room to discuss how to help.

They wanted to go to the earthquake zone and assist with the excavations and rescue missions but soon realised that they were not equipped for that.

“We had to take a breather and acknowledge this job is better left for construction companies or mining companies, and we should focus all our efforts on understanding what we can do best as Karpowership,” explained Zeynep Harezi, chief commercial officer of Karpowership.

Harezi described the impact of seeing the devastation.

“Literally, major cities had been completely levelled to the ground, with millions of people having lost their residences, houses and apartments and many having lost their lives.”

### Starting with a vision

Karpowership could do something to help, and it came in the form of an accommodation barge, named the Süheyla Sultan, named after Harezi's grandmother, Süheyla.

According to Harezi, her uncle Osman Karadeniz made the decision five years ago to purchase an accommodation barge built to service the oil and gas industry and turn it into a 'life ship', with multiple playgrounds, school classrooms, a nursery, infirmary and laundry facilities.



“He thought, I will keep this on standby, in case there’s ever an earthquake in Istanbul again, like 1999, and unfortunately, it became very useful for Iskenderun.” The Karpowership team filled the ship with new beds, linen, washing machines, toys for the nursery, books and opened coffee shops, a mainstay of Turkish society. In only three weeks the ship was on site in the Hatay-Iskenderun region and

ready to serve.

The private sector mobilised and many donated to the cause, said Harezi.

“Many Turkish suppliers provided their items at cost to us like the mattresses, the air conditioners, the paints, etc. It was a joint effort with the private sector.”

The ship is now home to more than 2000 people who lost everything as a result of the earthquake.



**Megastructure and lifesaver**

Besides being a home to many, Harezi emphasises that these ships are ultimately megastructures and a lot is required to keep them running.

“We employ many people to handle the technical and administrative side of the ships.

“We’ve connected them to the municipality water, the municipality electricity, transmission lines and the municipality sewage system so that they are acting in accordance with the municipality resources.

Harezi further explained that the port needed to be upgraded from a small fishing harbour to accommodate the ship, adding “we had to build a breakwater, do some dredging and upgrade the infrastructure there to be able to move these mega infrastructures.

She refers to it as “an absolute, magical cooperation between all parties involved.

### **Karadeniz Lifeship Rauf Bey Akademi**

According to Harezi, a second ship was also commandeered as a life ship.

Originally a high-speed ferry that operated between Ireland and England, Karpowership purchased the ferry to serve as a floating office during the company’s shipyard construction.

“It’s like a five-star hotel inside with coffee shops, cafeterias, meeting rooms, auditoriums, etc. Our technical team was able to convert that five-star luxury into a life ship.

“And we call these life ships because they literally save lives.”

The second ship, named Rauf Bey after Harezi’s grandfather, now acts as a boarding school.





### **Next steps – One World**

Harezi explained that [Karpowership](#) had always been active with various corporate social responsibility initiatives.

However, the earthquake acted as what she refers to as an “ignition point” to push these initiatives to the next level, leading to the establishment of a foundation, something that is not easy to do in Turkey.

The One World Karadeniz Foundation was founded and gave life to a concept close to Harezi’s grandfather’s heart.

“Because he came from a poor family and lost his father when he was 17, he had to work and take care of his younger brother, his mother, go to university and teach himself English at the same time.”

“He was able to become a global businessman. But during his early years, he went through many nights where he had to go to bed hungry. During his lifetime he was committed to making sure nobody else has to.”

Harezi explained that this principle of living in one world and helping those around you is a part of her family and now defines the One World Foundation.

“The two ships have been donated under our Foundation to the Governorate and the Ministry of Education for their use in times of need.

“They can stay there as long as they are needed. But we did not transfer the titles of those ships, so they can be deployed for any emergency relief operation globally. I hope they won’t be needed anywhere else.”

Currently, thousands of men, women and children are living on board these life ships, re-establishing a sense of community lost after the earthquake.



Children are going to school regularly and many adults are receiving vocational training on board the ships too, for example in the form of handcrafts.

Harezi explains: "We try to support them to sell the items they make by opening a portal for them to be able to do online sales. We also put up little marketplaces in Istanbul so they can send whatever handcrafts they make to sell there."

Despite the fact that Turkey is still recovering, with much work required to rebuild the damaged infrastructure, these life ships have gone a long way to improve the lives of many.

Harezi suggests they are an example of what can be achieved through cooperation between residents, companies and volunteers working towards a common goal.