

CHINA: FLOODS

11 July 1996

preliminary appeal no. 10/96

situation report no. 1

period covered: 8 - 11 July

Facing the sixth successive year of monsoon-season floods, staff and volunteers of the Red Cross Society of China (RCSC) have been working without respite since the start of the month responding to the relief and health needs of affected communities. More rain is expected and latest reports from Hubei Province indicate that the Yangtze River is rising rapidly. To date, RCSC efforts have been directed towards in-country fund-raising, food distributions, health and sanitation activities and liaising with Red Cross branches to prepare the Plan of Action to be included in the full International Federation appeal to be launched shortly. The Society's disaster preparedness centres in Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province) and Hefei (Anhui Province) have assumed key roles in responding to the catastrophe in their localities. All necessary relief goods are being purchased in China and National Societies are asked to respond to the International Federation appeal in cash - a further CHF 2.5 million is needed urgently.

The context

Floods in China are an annual event. This year, devastation by monsoon rains started in May reaching disaster proportions the first week of July. Massive flooding in at least nine provinces has occurred, with more than 20 million people affected in just four of the worst-hit provinces. The Red Cross Society of China has been active in providing relief to the floods victims from the very beginning. Thousands of RCSC staff, members, and volunteers are participating in some way in the relief operation. More rain is predicted while apprehension grows that this may ultimately be one of the worst years on record - with two months of the monsoon season remaining.

Latest events

The death toll continues to increase as more bodies are recovered from mud slides and collapsed homes. It is feared that over 400 people have lost their lives in this disaster, with thousands more injured. Damage assessment continues as the flood waters recede.

Mr Feng Qian, Secretary General of the Hubei Provincial Red Cross reported via mobile telephone to the RCSC Headquarters on 10 July that the Yangtze River, flowing through Wuhan, city of Hubei Province, is rising rapidly. The Army has been mobilised for emergency evacuations and to shore up protective barriers. The situation is serious with heavy rain predicted after several cloudy days with lighter rain.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Red Cross Society Headquarters •

Following the field assessments in Zhejiang and Anhui Provinces by Headquarters staff, all local branches have been asked to conduct local fund-raising campaigns. Close co-ordination among branches is being stressed.

The RCSC Relief Department is working with the branches to collect information, prepare needs assessments, and gather data as they finalise details for the full International Federation appeal to be launched shortly. This department is also the co-ordination point for the Federation Secretariat. Its five staff are working long hours each day, and have been on duty from onset of the disaster, since 1 July. Constant contact is being maintained with the Ministry of Civil Affairs, which has overall responsibility for government relief operations and public health.

The International Department is providing co-ordination for international affairs, including correspondence translation, as well as liaising with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Information Department is compiling and generating reports and updating the local media, in addition to disseminating Red Cross Red Crescent information and working with the local branches.

Red Cross Society of China Branches •

When the floods struck, RCSC branches throughout China quickly launched fund-raising campaigns. As part of these on-going activities, cash and in-kind contributions are being collected; local staff and Society members are cleaning, sorting, packaging and shipping relief materials to RCSC branches in the affected areas for distribution to the floods victims by the Red Cross. Staff and volunteers living in or near the affected areas are also making visits to the floods victims to offer comfort and support, as well as continuing to assess the needs of the beneficiaries.

Red Cross Society of China Medical Teams •

RCSC medical and disease prevention teams, in close co-operation with the Departments of Public Health and Disease Prevention, moved into the floods-hit areas in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. Working shifts of more than 12 hours and often travelling long distances just to reach the site, these teams are

providing first aid and follow up treatment to the injured, and undertaking safe water and disease control activities.

Several of the teams are operating out of basic tents, marked with the RCSC emblem, as no other facilities are available. Staff work in standard whites with a RCSC badge on their sleeve. When a patient is deemed to be in need of hospitalisation, ambulance crews transport them to the nearest and most appropriate hospital or assist in arranging evacuation by boat or air.

To combat the spread of communicable and water-borne diseases, the teams disinfect wells, flush pipes, spray disinfectant on stagnant ponds of water, and spray buildings and public areas that may harbour infectious agents.

The teams are prepared to stay in the disaster areas as long as the need exists. Information on deployment of the teams in 4 provinces has been collected:

PROVINCE	TEAMS	PERSONNEL	LENGTH OF STAY	CITIES AND PREFECTURES	COUNTIES
Anhui	324	1,280	14 - 90 days	9	38
Guizhou	300	1,300	10 days	10	---
Jiangxi	219	1,117	15 - 20 days	10	---
Zhejiang	103	521	14 - 21 days	3	21
TOTAL NUMBER OF TEAMS = 946 TOTAL NUMBER OF PERSONNEL = 4,218					

Respiratory illness, gastro-intestinal disorders, and infections are being treated. The current information indicates that the disease patterns are normal for flooding situations.

Red Cross Society of China Disaster Preparedness Centres •

At the Hangzhou Regional Disaster Preparedness Centre, in Zhejiang Province, the Provincial Red Cross branch facilitated a co-ordination meeting with seven local agencies, resulting in a fund-raising "kick off campaign". As of 5 July, this effort had raised over 85,000 RMB (CHF 12,200) in cash and in-kind contributions. Relief goods are being processed at the DP Centre. The DP Centre staff, working closely with the Hangzhou City Red Cross, released medicines from their relief stocks as soon as the disaster began. With RMB 200,000 (CHF 28,735) provided by RCSC Headquarters from its emergency fund, rice and disinfectants have been procured for distribution by Red Cross branches to floods victims.

At the Hefei Disaster Preparedness Centre in Anhui Province, staff and volunteers procured and distributed relief goods using the allocation of RMB 200,000 from National Headquarters. Other relief goods from locally-held stocks have been provided to the floods victims.

Outstanding needs

The Red Cross Society of China has determined that the floods victims greatest needs at present are: food, medicine, disinfectants and clothing. Cash contributions are required to support the relief operation. The Red Cross Society of China will procure needed relief supplies in country to:

- ◆ reduce delivery and distribution time;
- ◆ save on transport and storage costs;
- ◆ allow quick response to varying local needs;
- ◆ provide medicines and disinfectants with dosages and instructions-for-usage in local languages;
- ◆ distribute goods familiar to the beneficiaries;
- ◆ support local economies impacted by this disaster.

Given the new flooding on the Yangtze River, a situation the RCSC is watching closely, the geographical area covered by the forthcoming appeal may need to be expanded.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Central China Television (CCTV) was taping RCSC activities at the newly inaugurated Chengdu Disaster Preparedness Centre for a documentary about the RCSC DP Centres when this disaster hit. The film crew quickly moved to Zhejiang Province and filmed RCSC activities at the Hangzhou Regional DP Centre and in other parts of the disaster area.

Since the start of the disaster, comments and information provided by national and local RCSC officials have appeared regularly in the international media.

Contributions

Refer to Annex 1

Conclusion

With more rain predicted and the search and rescue operation continuing, the overall impact of this on-going disaster remains unknown. With its vast network of branches, the Red Cross Society of China has been able to respond swiftly to the needs of the floods victims. The quick response and support by sister Societies is greatly appreciated by the Red Cross Society of China, which is urgently preparing the Plan of Action for the appeal to be available within a few days. Meanwhile, as this extensive and on-going disaster unfolds, donors are urged to respond to the International Federation's appeal rapidly and positively.

Kris Hurlburt
Desk Officer
Asia & Pacific Department

Jerry Talbot,
Director
Asia & Pacific Department