

CENTRAL ASIA: COLD AND HUNGER (WINTER 1998-1999)

appeal no: 34/98
12 November 1998

***THIS APPEAL SEEKS CHF 4,311,000
IN CASH, KIND AND SERVICES
TO ASSIST 480,000 BENEFICIARIES IN THE CENTRAL
ASIAN COUNTRIES OF KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN,
UZBEKISTAN AND TURKMENISTAN***

Summary

This appeal targets 480,000 of the most vulnerable in the four Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan who have faced hardship in the last year in the form of a severe winter in 1997-98, followed by spring floods and landslides in the mountain and delta regions, and drought and crop failure in the steppe and lowland areas. All these disasters have taken place in the context of severe, widespread economic decline.

For millions of people in Central Asia, the spectre of starvation looms large, as cold and hunger begin to bite at the start of the winter in Central Asia. This Appeal targets the most vulnerable who are mainly isolated elderly, multichildren families and others affected by flooding in the late spring who lack the basic necessities to survive a cold winter.

The Disaster

1998 has been a catastrophic year for Central Asia. Last winter more snow fell in the Pamirs, Tianshan and other mountain ranges than has fallen in the previous ten winters combined. A sudden warm (albeit late) spring, combined with the breakdown of the early warning systems which, during Soviet times had monitored impending disasters, resulted in unprecedented damage and displacement as a result of flooding and land-slides. The National Societies in the region responded, bringing much needed emergency assistance to those who lost everything in these sudden disasters. Although the National Societies were able to respond to the initial emergency with food and other items, many of those assisted now find themselves once again without adequate food, clothes, shelter or means of earning a living and face a very difficult winter.

The summer brought a drought of an intensity unknown in recent history whereby entire regions saw their crops shrivel and die. In Soviet times the grain harvest in Kazakhstan, the grain bowl of Central Asia, averaged 30 million tonnes per annum. In 1997, the harvest was reduced to 12.5 million tonnes - much depreciated as a result of the unremitting decline in infrastructure caused by both a lack of maintenance and the collapse of unsustainable (in economic terms) irrigation systems.

It is estimated that the harvest in Kazakhstan in 1998 will be less than 7.5 million tonnes, a quarter of the pre-transition average. The combination of neglect, unsustainable systems and a ferocious drought has devastated thousands of hectares of land. Kazakhstan's President Nazarbaev has personally pledged that one million tonnes of wheat will be purchased.

In Kyrgyzstan, never self-sufficient in grain, the situation is so bad that President Akaev has already appealed to the international community to provide an additional 20-30,000 tonnes to see the country through the winter.

This desperately poor harvest will have a number of effects in addition to the more obvious increases in price and shortage of food staples. In the past year world grain prices have been low. The combination of low prices and poor yields is driving many farms out of business and still more are being forced to lay off workers. Traditionally, these "kolhoz" and "sovhoz" were the major employers in Central Asia and supported the majority of the population through the extended family system, providing schools and health care facilities as well as wages. In this new era of market forces, this system is no longer sustainable and many people are having to seek alternative sources of employment with resultant migration towards the cities and urban areas. In reality, there is little alternative employment in the cities and the prospects for large numbers of people are bleak indeed.

{ *Kazakhstan*

Due to severe droughts in many parts of the country, this year's grain harvest is expected to be barely half of that of recent years. At the same time, the world market price for grain has become so low that it is difficult to cover production costs. In addition, incomplete land privatisation does not allow farmers to mortgage their land in order to continue their activities using bank loans. Agricultural advisers expect that many grain farmers will leave the land and will not plant crops next year.

Furthermore, extensive damage was inflicted by floods, mud slides and debris flows which took place in the late Spring. In southern Kazakhstan the damage ran into many millions of dollars and left numerous people in desperate need of assistance.

According to data from the National Statistics Agency, the proportion of the population with an income below the subsistence minimum has increased from 60% to 78% in urban areas, and in rural areas the figure is an even more alarming 90%.

Many ethnic Kazakhs who have lived abroad for a long period of time and who have recently returned to Kazakhstan outside the Presidential quota (an approved number each year), are facing difficulties. Efforts will be made to assist those ethnic Kazakhs who fall into the category of most vulnerable.

{ *Kyrgyzstan*

The combination of unfavourable climatic conditions and natural disasters has resulted in a continuation in the decline of living conditions for the majority of the population. Failing harvests and the devastating floods earlier this year have added to the existing 70% of the population living below the poverty line.

The appeal of the President for grain assistance illustrates the extent of the problem. As the country's social security system is almost non-existent, after years of steady economic decline many people are struggling to survive.

While reconstruction of the infrastructure in flood stricken areas is progressing (mainly as a result of credits from the World Bank and Asian Development Bank), the situation of those who lost all their belongings looks dire with the onset of winter. They have no means to replace their lost possessions and to purchase food which is becoming scarce since large areas of crops were destroyed.

{ Uzbekistan

In Uzbekistan's rural areas indicators of extreme poverty are present: high rates of infant and maternal mortality, widespread infectious diseases, and plunging life expectancy. TB is advancing at an alarming rate and during their lifetime, nearly half of the Uzbek population falls sick with hepatitis.

Almost 45% of the working population's income is insufficient to secure a minimum living standard and 30% of the multichildren families have no regular income and are battling for survival.

While the Amu Darya river reached the Aral Sea for the first time in ten years, the accompanying floodwaters damaged huge swathes of farmland, destroyed agricultural equipment and exposed whole communities to serious economic hardship. Other drastic flooding occurred in the more mountainous areas when the Ak Su and Shahimardan rivers burst their banks on the Kyrgyzstan/Uzbekistan border on 8th July. Some one hundred people were killed by the floods, and the livelihood of many thousands was ruined when a major holiday resort area was closed for safety reasons.

{ Turkmenistan

In Turkmenistan, 70% of the population has a monthly income of USD 15 or less, which puts them literally on a "bread and tea only" diet. Health indicators such as infant and maternal mortality and life expectancy reflect the rapid decline of living standards.

Numerous floods earlier this year over a four month period in spring and summer affected five regions in Turkmenistan destroying almost 4,000 houses. The livelihood of more than 5,000 families was ruined after widespread flooding destroyed crops leaving the local population without any means of generating an income.

These disasters and the continuing socio-economic crisis creates even greater hardship and suffering for the growing number of vulnerable people in Turkmenistan.

The Response So Far

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action w

The results of a vulnerability survey conducted last year by the Kazakhstan Red Cross and Red Crescent Society (KRCRCS) testified to the extent of the economic crisis in Kazakhstan. More than 70% of the respondents consumed less food than the minimum consumer basket. Approximately 46% of the population had no winter clothes or footwear, 62% had serious heating problems, and 11 % of the children could not attend school because of the lack of clothing and shoes. This year the situation has worsened.

Some members of the Red Crescent survey teams who conducted the vulnerability survey last year, have revisited a number of last year's respondents and have clearly observed that the social and economic situation has continued to deteriorate. The financial crisis in Russia has also affected Kazakhstan and resulted in a general increase in prices, particularly for basic food items.

The Red Crescent Society of Uzbekistan has recently completed a vulnerability survey of four Oblasts in the Aral Sea region. This was funded by the Swedish Red Cross and will provide detailed information from 1,603 respondents. This information will be available by 15th November and will be a useful tool in order to verify the accuracy of the beneficiary lists.

Co-ordination w

Significant preparatory work has been carried out by alerting potential donors within the region. The Regional Delegation and the KRCRCS have already encouraged community support from both the local and large international community through various fundraising activities which also assist in raising awareness.

The Appeal will be co-ordinated with other international and non-governmental organisations operating in the region, particularly Counterpart International and the UN system.

The Intended Operation

Red Cross/Red Crescent Objectives w

The most vulnerable will be selected in accordance with the following criteria:

- { those who have been deprived of their homes, their possessions and the means of earning a living;
- { those who are too old to work and whose pension is inadequate to enable them to survive;
- { other vulnerable groups such as single parent/multichildren families

The Operation aims:

- { To provide 15,000 vulnerable persons in urban areas with one hot meal per day through 25 public canteens.
- { To provide 75,000 beneficiary families (with a planning figure of 5 persons per family) from rural areas with a much needed supplement to their meagre diet by providing one food parcel per beneficiary.
- { To provide 50,000 beneficiaries with warm clothing to enable them to survive the harsh winter.
- { To provide 40,000 school age children with winter shoes for protection against the winter weather and to enable them to attend school in freezing temperatures.

National Society/Federation Plan of Action

Beneficiaries have been selected by the National Society Oblast committees on the basis of need and in co-operation with the local authorities. Purchase of relief supplies, transportation and distribution will be undertaken by the National Societies with the support and supervision of the Federation.

Monitoring will be carried out on an ongoing basis by National Society and Federation representatives.

PLAN OF ACTION BY COUNTRY

	Supplementary Food	Hot meals	Winter Clothing	Winter Boots
Kazakhstan	25,000	4,800	15,000	15,000
Kyrgyzstan	15,000	3,000	10,000	5,000
Uzbekistan	20,000	4,200	15,000	15,000
Turkmenistan	15,000	3,000	10,000	5,000
TOTAL	75,000 families 375,000 persons	15,000	50,000	40,000

- Hot Meals:** pensioners/children in urban centres and rural areas to receive a daily hot meal, beneficiaries are to rotate on monthly basis.
- Supplementary Food:** vulnerable families in rural areas to receive a food parcel, 3 distributions, each to assist for 2 months.
- Winter Clothing:** multichildren families in urban centras and rural areas to receive winter clothing, 3 distributions.
- Winter Boots:** school age children to be provided with winter boots, 2 distributions.

Capacity of the National Societies w

From 1993 the Federation has put considerable effort into strengthening the capacity of the four National Societies in the Region. As a result, the National Societies have well-trained, qualified disaster preparedness, information, relief, development and youth officers. All the Societies have good experience in managing relief operations of this size and with a growing number of volunteers, particularly among the younger age group, there will be a strong volunteer component in the relief work.

The weaknesses of the National Societies from a capacity-building point of view are the lack of vehicles, warehouses and telecommunications facilities at the Oblast level. There is also an unequal spread of volunteer networks for implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes. However, the Federation is giving support and expertise in these areas through the activities of the institutional development programme and training in technical skills.

The National Societies will each prepare separate final reports which will be compiled by the Federation co-ordinator.

Capacity of the Federation w

The Appeal includes the operating costs of a Federation delegate who will co-ordinate and monitor all aspects of the operation. Additional tasks will be carried out by the four National Societies concerned which will benefit from support from the Regional Delegation in Almaty.

Budget Summary

See Annex 1.

Conclusion

Without additional support from the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and the respective governments this winter, elderly people and multichildren families in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan will face the real danger of chronic hunger towards the end of this winter. Furthermore, the combination of rising food prices, unpaid pensions and the unusually cold start to the winter for which the forecast is more severe than usual, is a cause of grave concern.

The Regional Delegation and the four National Societies within the Region aim to help the respective populations in facing the hardships of the fast-approaching winter conditions and to increase advocacy for the most vulnerable.

Margareta Wahlström
Under Secretary General,
Disaster Response & Operations Coordination

George Weber
Secretary General

REPORT SUMMARY
CENTRAL ASIA: WINTER APPEAL

IN CHF

RELIEF NEEDS**NON FOOD ITEMS**

Cooking stove/Gas (25 canteens x CHF 50 x 6 months)	7,500.00
Pots & pans (25 canteens x CHF 150)	3,750.00
Winter boots (40.000 pairs x CHF 18)	720,000.00

FOOD ITEMS

Soup kitchens (CHF 2.49 x 25 canteens x 25 days x 6 months x 100 beneficiaries)	933,750.00
Rice (800 MT x CHF375)	300,000.00
Wheat flour (750 MT x CHF 800)	375,000.00
Oil (375 MT x CHF 2300)	862,500.00

TOTAL RELIEF NEEDS **3,202,500.00**

Transport, storage & vehicle costs

Warehouse costs	156,000.00
Transport of goods	255,000.00
Vehicles costs	67,000.00

Personnel

Expat staff (2 delegates / regional delegation costs)	160,000.00
Personnel (local staff)	120,000.00
Training	40,000.00

General and administrative expenditures

Travel and Communication	10,000.00
Information	80,000.00
Administrative, office & general expenses	75,000.00

Secretariat operational support	145,500.00
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TOTAL OPERATIONAL NEEDS **1,108,500.00**

TOTAL APPEAL CASH & KIND/SERVICES **4,311,000.00**

LESS CASH ON HAND 0.00

NET REQUEST CASH & KIND **4,311,000.00**
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