

INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

DPR KOREA: TRAIN EXPLOSION DISASTER

25 April 2004

The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 181 countries.

In Brief

This Information Bulletin (no. 02/2004) is being issued based on the needs described below reflecting the information available at this time. CHF 50,000 has been allocated from the Federation's Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF). Following assessments conducted over the past two days by the DPRK Red Cross and the International Federation, the International Federation will provide support for relief activities through an Emergency Appeal to be launched shortly.

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The Situation

Several thousand people have been left homeless following the massive explosion which occurred on Thursday 22 April, at noon at Ryongchon railway station in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK) North Pyongan Province. The explosion is said to have been caused when two rail wagons, reportedly loaded with ammonium nitrate, blew up during a shunting operation. The blast obliterated the station and the immediate vicinity, causing damage within a radius of four kilometres.

As of Sunday 25 April, the official death toll has risen to 161 people. Among the dead are 76 children whose school was levelled in the blast. The explosion occurred as the children were on



their way home for lunch. According to the most recent information from the DPRK's Flood Damage Rehabilitation Committee (FDRC), some 1,300 people were injured and about 700 hospitalized due to the explosion.

The FDRC has confirmed that some 1,850 homes were destroyed or totally damaged, while a further 6,360 have sustained partial damage. The thousands left homeless due to the blast's damage have been provided with temporary shelter in schools and public buildings, or else they have been taken in by relatives and neighbours less affected.

Among the large number of public buildings damaged were schools, the county hospital, a factory and an agricultural college. With the hospital damaged by the explosion, most of the severely wounded – some 357 people – were taken to the North Pyongan provincial hospital at Sinuiju near the Chinese border. Others were taken for treatment to Pyongbuk Hospital, Sanwon Hospital, Provincial Pediatrics Hospital, Maternity Hospital, and Sinuiju City Hospital.

Federation delegates who visited the scene of the disaster reported a huge crater at the centre of the blast, and said the nearest surviving buildings had been scorched as though a fireball had swept through them. Some 40 per cent of this town of 27,000 people have been affected by disruptions to supplies of electricity and water supplies, and communications.

The county of Ryongchon has a population 130,000 and is in one of four provinces where the DPRK Red Cross (DPRK RC) and the Federation are providing regular humanitarian health and care support.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action

DPRK Red Cross

The local branch of the DPRK RC responded immediately after the explosion by establishing five temporary first-aid posts close to the disaster site, and mobilizing 398 Red Cross volunteers.

A relief operation was also mounted. The DPRK Red Cross, supported by the Federation, maintains five disaster preparedness centres (DP Center) which are spread strategically through the country. One is located near Sinuiju, just five kilometres from Ryongchon. After the National Society had conducted an initial assessment at the request of the FDRC on Friday, 23 April, trucks left the centre's warehouse carrying 2,000 kitchen sets, 10,000 blankets, 2,000 water containers, 2,000 tarpaulins, 720,000 water purification tablets and 1,000 first aid kits. A Federation logistics coordinator from Pyongyang who had been in the area assisted the DPRK RC in the distribution which has been ongoing.

The Federation delegates took with them two trucks and five other vehicles loaded with first-aid and medical supplies. Three days prior to the blast, the National Society/Federation had delivered medical supplies to hospitals and clinics in the area which, with the new consignment, meant immediate needs in Ryongchon could be covered. The delivery was part of an ongoing four-province Red Cross medical programme which ensures annual assistance to six million people.

The DPRK Red Cross with support from the Federation have distributed the following urgently needed relief items to persons affected by the aftermath of the explosion on 24 April:

Relief items:

Date	Item	Unit	Quantity	Warehouse
24.4.2004	Kitchen set	set	2,000	Sinuiju, DP Centre
24.4.2004	Blanket	pcs	10,000	Sinuiju, DP centre
24.4.2004	Water container	pcs	2,000	Sinuiju, DP centre
24.4.2004	Tarpaulin	pcs	2,000	Sinuiju, DP centre
24.4.2004	Water purification tablet	tablet	720,000	Sinuiju, DP centre
24.4.2004	First Aid kit	kit	687	DP Centre
24.4.2004	First Aid refill kit	kit	30	DP Centre
25.4.2004	Kitchen set	set	500	Sinuiju DP centre

25.4.2004	Blanket	pcs	4,000	Sinuiju DP centre
25.4.2004	Water container	pcs	1,228	Sinuiju DP centre
25.4.2004	Water container	pcs	1,812	DP Centre

Medicines:

Date	Item	Kit	Cartoons	Hospital
24.4.04	Supplementary kit	8	80	Ryongchon County Hospital
24.4.04	Supplementary kit	13	130	Sinuiju
24.4.04	Supplementary kit (extra)	3	30	Sinuiju
	Total	24		

The Federation logistics coordinator and his DPRK RC counterpart will be bringing additional relief goods to the disaster area, while the Federation's water/sanitation delegate and health delegate will continue to conduct technical assessments in the field to estimate further need.

Coordination

On 24 April, a further five Federation delegates travelled to the disaster site from Pyongyang as part of an inter-agency assessment mission responding to a formal request from the government. Among other participants were OCHA, UNICEF, WHO, WFP, FAO, ICRC, ECHO, Concern Worldwide, German AgroAction, and Premiere Urgence. A number of diplomatic missions were also represented.

Dr. Yoon Gu Lee, President of Rep. of the Korea National Red Cross (RoK RC), was informed of the accident by Dr. Jang Jae On, President of DPRK Red Cross (DPRK RC) on 23 April while he was in Pyongyang for discussions on inter Korean cooperation matters with DPRK Red Cross. Once Dr. Lee knew about this disaster, he expressed his intent to extend possible assistance for the affected people through DPRK RC. The RoK RC now plans to send 100,000 instant noodles, 10,200 bottles of mineral water (1.8 liter each), 3,000 blankets, 3,000 training suits and 3,000 hygiene and other non-food items (total value of USD 387,000) to the DPRK RC as soon as possible.

Offers from donor partners to Red Cross to support the affected people by this disaster have been overwhelming. The International Federation in cooperation with DPRK RC is in the process of launching Preliminary Emergency Appeal, which will incorporate the replenishment of already distributed materials as well as the planned contribution by RoK RC.

While the international telephone lines with the Federation's DPRK Delegation have been inoperable under this emergency situation, the Federation's regional information delegate in Beijing has been backing up and giving extensive support to DPRK Delegation in terms of media interviews. The Regional Delegation in Beijing has been supporting the DPRK Delegation in reporting and planning.

Needs

Emergency needs can be covered by in-country stocks but there is a need for the replenishment of the stocks distributed so far. Further assessment is required for a rehabilitation phase, particularly in the fields of health and water/sanitation.

The DPRK RC and the International Federation share the great concern of the authorities for the people who have been left homeless. The IFRC has placed priority on rehabilitation and appealed for assistance in the reconstruction of homes, health facilities and public buildings. DPRK RC in cooperation with the International Federation will further assess the need in this regard.

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