

CHINA: NORTHWEST SNOW STORMS

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Latest events

Since mid-November 1995 the Northwest region of China, particularly Qinghai and Sichuan Provinces, and the Tibetan Autonomous Region, has been hit repeatedly by extremely low temperatures and unusually heavy snowfalls. Inhabitants of many counties are now facing extreme hardship as a result of the continuing snowstorms. Sufficient supplies of food, medicine, warm clothing and heating fuel are lacking. Over 700,000 head of livestock have died since the storms began. The Red Cross Society of China provided the following information about the situation in Qinghai Province.

The most severely-affected areas in Qinghai Province are the counties of Yushu, Chengduo and Zaduo, where snow has accumulated to a depth of between 35-100 cm. Temperatures have plunged to record lows of - 45° C in this high altitude, mountainous environment. In Yushu Prefecture, 20 of the 30 townships inhabited by herdsmen have been paralysed by heavy snow. Of these, 44,094 people (9,261 households) in 88 villages are particularly badly affected. Almost 20,000 people have been temporarily blinded by the snow; frostbite has afflicted 8,755 children and adults; and influenza, dysentery and pneumonia affected a further 5,000.

The herdsmen and their families depend upon livestock for their existence. Nearly 300,000 animals died from starvation and exposure as the grasslands of Qinghai Province were encased by the heavy snow. Families have resorted to giving their own stocks of grain to the animals to keep their dwindling herds alive. Currently 2,312 households face food shortages. Diesel oil for heating is also in short supply.

Red Cross action

The Red Cross Society of China sent RMB 250,000 (CHF 35,000) in cash and in-kind contributions from its emergency relief supplies. The Yushu Prefecture Red Cross and six Red Cross county level branches dispatched 20 medical teams to the stricken area, donating medicines valued at RMB 15,000 (CHF 2,100). The Qinghai provincial Red Cross also provided medicine valued at RMB 40,000 (CHF 5,600). Data is still being gathered on the situation in Sichuan Province and the Tibetan Autonomous Region.

The Federation Secretariat remains in contact with the Red Cross Society of China to assess the need for international assistance. National Societies and other donors will be kept informed of the situation as it develops so that a co-ordinated and efficient response can be made through the Federation's appeal process if necessary.

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