CHINA

YUNNAN EARTHQUAKE

FINAL REPORT

Reporting Period : February - October 1996
THE DISASTER

At 19.14 hours on 3 February 1996 an earthquake measuring 7.0 on the Richter Scale struck north-western Yunnan Province in China. Four prefectures and 9 counties were affected including Dali, Diqing, Lijiang, and Nujiang -- the most seriously affected being Lijiang. 309 people were killed, 3925 were seriously injured, and 12,985 suffered less serious injuries. Due to the time of year and altitude (2400 metres), the cold added to the health concerns of the approximately 1 million people affected. At least 350,000 rooms were destroyed while another 670,000 rooms sustained damage, leaving 200,000 people homeless. More than 100,000 farm animals died. Infrastructure sustained heavy damage. Several hospitals were severely damaged and medical equipment ruined. Several dozen Red Cross First Aid Stations were destroyed or significantly damaged. More than 30,000 tonnes of grain were lost. The economic losses exceeded 4 billion Chinese Yuan (CHF 121 million). Then, on 25 May, a severe storm brought additional damage as hail the size of ping pong balls piled up 30 - 60 cm deep, crushing over 9,000 hectares of crops, and caused a major setback in the rebuilding process. This resulted in severe damage to many of the buildings under repair, including several first aid stations and hospitals.

Yunnan Province covers an area of 394,000 square kilometres and borders Myanmar, Vietnam and Laos. Forty million people live in its 17 prefectures/cities and 128 counties. 52 minority groups are represented in Yunnan, collectively comprising one-third of the population. Mountains cover 94% of the land, rising to 6730 metres at the peak of Mount Kagebo. The province suffered three major earthquakes between July 1995 and February 1996. From March 1995 to February 1996 approximately 28 million people in Yunnan were affected by some type of natural disaster ranging from earthquakes, landslides, and floods.

THE OPERATION

No appeal was launched. During the initial stages of the disaster some confusion was created when it was reported in the international media that this had been done. Discussions were held with the Red Cross Society of China. Based upon their input, the decision was made not to launch an appeal.

Given the scope of the disaster and the strong desire of National Societies to assist the Red Cross Society of China, three planeloads of emergency relief supplies were sent to Kunming. Working on behalf of the Federation, the British Red Cross organised one of these flights, while the others were handled by the Logistics Department at the Secretariat. Blankets, plastic sheeting, jerry cans, and family tents were airlifted to Kunming airport in Yunnan Province. The goods were then transported by the Yunnan Provincial Branch (YPB) of the Red Cross Society of China (RCSC) over difficult terrain, taking up to a full day to reach the disaster area.

Contributions in excess of those needed to cover the cost of the airlifted goods and transportation were received from National Societies. It was agreed with the RCSC that additional funds could be used to fulfil other needs related to the disaster (refer to Annex 3). These included transportation and administrative costs, medicine and medical supplies, dissemination materials, and extra salary payments for staff who spent a national holiday working in the disaster area.
In addition, contributions were made towards the reconstruction of 2 township level RCSC First Aid Stations in Jiuhe and Qihe where the hospitals housing the RCSC First Aid Stations were almost completely destroyed by the earthquake. Jiuhe and Qihe Townships represent two of the most devastated communities in Lijiang County and include 20 villages. Community members, isolated geographically in the rugged mountains, have no medical facilities after the earthquake. Transportation to other medical facilities is difficult as winding, bumpy, roads making access to emergency treatment slow and dangerous for those in urgent need.

It is estimated that it will cost 2.4 million Chinese Yuan to rebuild the medical facilities. The Yunnan Provincial Branch reached an agreement with the Government that, with a contribution to the rebuilding of 400,000 Yuan, the Red Cross will be provided with a First Aid Station, a Red Cross office, and a training meeting room in each hospital. This will replace the facilities lost by the Red Cross in the earthquake. As almost all of the RC equipment and supplies were destroyed, the facilities must be furnished and restocked to become operable.

The RCSC First Aid Stations provide for non-surgical emergency care, response to on-site community disasters, health care education, RC volunteer training, dissemination of RC information, and meeting space for RC and community gatherings. Staff, volunteers, and patients benefit from the co-location in a health establishment where critical medical cases can be quickly transferred to hospital facilities.

While all 45,000 residents of the areas will have access to the RCSC First Aid Stations, the most vulnerable will be given a 20% discount for a period of up to five years - the estimated time required to rebuild the community. The number of vulnerable will decrease over this period as homes and other community services are restored. The most vulnerable elderly, disabled, orphaned, and poor will be selected by the local RCSC units to receive the discount.

Approximately 120,000 people directly benefited from relief goods provided through the RCSC and the Federation. Thousands more will receive first aid and first aid training once the First Aid Stations are completed.

**The Delegation**

No Delegation was established in response to this disaster. However the Secretariat Desk Officer, accompanied by the Desk Officer from the British Red Cross and the RCSC Deputy Director of the Relief Department spent several days in Yunnan Province and in Beijing discussing the operation and reviewing records. From these meetings, the plan for use of the excess contributions was developed.

**Role of the Red Cross Society of China**

The YPB responded almost immediately. Within 3 hours of the disaster, Branch officials met with those from the Public Health Department. Together they organised and deployed 26 medical teams. The first team into the disaster area was led by the Vice President of the YPB. More than 16,000 people received medical care from the joint RCSC and Public Health medical teams. A total of 447 medical staff participated - often performing lifesaving surgery in extremely adverse conditions as well as transporting by ambulance and assigning the most seriously injured for airlift evacuation to provincial hospitals outside the disaster area. Food, shelter, clothing, and quilts were quickly distributed from the national, provincial and local Red Cross Society of China stocks.
Within seven hours of the earthquake, the YPB provided the RCSC Headquarters with a preliminary list of needs. Money was released from emergency funds and sent to the YPB. The Headquarters alerted the Federation Secretariat that in turn notified the National Societies and other organisations.

The morning after the earthquake, the Secretary General of the YPB delivered medicine, food, clothing, and tents to the stricken area. Nine staff from the YPB spent a total of 209 days assisting the earthquake victims. Eleven staff from Headquarters spent a total of 60 days in the field. Volunteers worked in all aspects of the operation.

Other branches of the RCSC held fund-raising campaigns and delivered relief supplies from their emergency stocks.

During the emergency phase of the operation, the YPB handled 1400 tonnes of relief goods valued at CHF 6.8 million, met and transported 4 planeloads of relief supplies, and co-ordinated 14 other planes arriving with relief assistance.

The YPB was established in 1914 and has 45,000 members, 20,000 of whom are youth members. There are more than 3800 Red Cross associations in villages, medical departments, schools, factories and mines.

**Co-operation with the authorities and other agencies**

The Red Cross Society of China worked in close co-operation with the government at the national, provincial and local levels -- primarily the Public Health and Civil Affairs Departments. The military provided some assistance in transport of emergency goods and personnel. The Public Health Department released medical staff to work with the Red Cross Medical Teams. Civil Affairs provided statistical information and worked with the RCSC to co-ordinate relief efforts.

During the critical emergency phase of the operation, an international NGO approached the provincial government requesting access to the disaster site. They were referred on to the YPB, which was stretched thin and inexperienced in working with international organisations. As a result they took the NGO on as a partner instead of putting themselves in a co-ordinating role. Although the YPB worked well with the NGO, the decision proved a drain on their human resources.

**ANALYSIS OF THE OPERATION**

**Needs assessment**

The needs assessment done by the YPB with technical support from the RCSC Headquarters proved to be an accurate one in terms of emergency relief. World wide response to this earthquake was tremendous: if an appeal had been launched the RCSC could have played a more prominent role, especially during the rehabilitation phase. However, with the external aid provided, emergency needs of the most vulnerable were adequately covered.
Objectives/plan of action

The initial objectives laid out by the Federation to provide emergency relief items was appropriate. As in any serious earthquake, rehabilitation of the community takes a long time. The subsequent Plan of Action to assist in the restoration of two local RCSC First Aid Stations will allow the RCSC to maintain its services to the most vulnerable in this disaster prone area.

Without an appeal the Federation was in a situation where Donors were willing to contribute but did not have a vehicle to do so. A number of branches of National Societies, or the Society itself, and at least one NGO, made direct cash and in-kind contributions. The YPB found itself in the position of being unable to refuse assistance. In at least two instances the Plan of Action was driven by the donor and not the RCSC. This resulted in differing standards of relief aid and drained the human resources needed by the YPB in their operation. Learning from this experience and a similar situation in the floods of 1996, the RCSC has since developed guidelines on how to work with other organisations in disaster settings. In some cases NGOs will be referred to work with the Civil Affairs Department. In partnerships, the RCSC will be responsible for the Plan of Action, with input from the donor or Federation as appropriate.

CONCLUSIONS

The immediate response of the YPB and the RCSC Headquarters to such a large disaster with needed Medical Teams once again demonstrated the RCSC's capacity for quick and appropriate action. The YPB utilised the good relationships it has developed with the local and provincial government offices and the community to provide a cohesive response. They were able to manage a large influx of relief goods, arriving both ad hoc and planned, from around the world.

Some Participating National Societies found themselves competing with an NGO working with the YPB for funds from their governments, while it was unclear exactly what the relationship was in the field. Several discussions were held between the Secretariat and the RCSC, and the RCSC has now taken steps to ensure that this situation is not repeated in future operations.

While this was not the largest disaster to strike China in 1996, because it was an earthquake it evoked a tremendous emotional response from the international media and community. This revisited lesson again underscores the need, when such intense media exposure exists, to support an Operating National Society in its decision making process, while recognising the needs of the donors.

This disaster also demonstrates how, if all participants work together as a Federation, the Operating National Society would be better equipped to respond, and Participating National Societies would be able to provide support in a more cohesive way, better reflecting the basic principles of disaster response.

Kris Hurlburt
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### EXPENDITURES FOR CASH TRANSFERS MADE TO THE RCSC:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emergency medical supplies</td>
<td>248,509.30</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCSC First Aid Stations - reconstruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>RCSC First Aid Stations - supplies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transportation of relief supplies and personnel, dissemination, salaries,</td>
<td>285,053.72</td>
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<td>administration by YPB</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emergency funds for relief supplies and administration by RCSC Headquarters</td>
<td>300,000.00</td>
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**TOTAL IN CHINESE YUAN**  
1,770,619.02

**Approximate total in CHF**  
267,000.00