

# 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

## **MONGOLIA SNOWFALLS**

30 January 2002

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*This Bulletin is for information only. The Federation is not seeking any funding or other assistance from donors for this operation at this time.*

### ***The Situation***

The Mongolia Red Cross Society and Federation assessment mission to three southern provinces (aimags) Altai, Bayanhongor and Uverkhngai, conducted last week, has confirmed the serious situation that has been reported in the local media. Additional information is being sourced for the western and north western aimags of Bayan Olgii, Khovd, Zavkhan and Uvs.

Much of the area is subject to desertification, with the Gobi desert expanding northwards, and has also endured three years of drought. This has resulted in little grass growth over the summer. As a result, animals have not put on enough fat to survive the winter and there has been insufficient hay or fodder harvested for winter feed.

With heavy snowfalls covering the limited grazing and very cold temperatures, reaching as low as -40°C at night in the southern and western aimags, there has already been a high loss of livestock. Dead animals can be seen scattered over the steppe land and in groups near herders' gers ( yurts ). All families visited had lost a high percentage of their animals and predict more will perish. One family had lost 1,200 animals out of 1,600.

In Mongolia, livestock are essential to every aspect of herder family lives; providing food, fuel, clothing, shelter, transport and a source of income. Clearly, this situation is having a drastic affect on the herding families who have struggled through three years of similar conditions, (drought followed by severe winter), known locally as " Dzud ".

Many are exhausted, in poor health and psychologically affected. There have been reports in Gobi Altai of suicides. In the same province, three men died of exposure while trying to locate some of the many horses that had been driven away by strong winds from the NW.

After three months of winter and the very cold and windy conditions expected in spring, the situation is predicted to deteriorate as the year progresses. More animals will perish and few will be born, as weakened mothers have naturally aborted their young. Poor health has prevented animals from lactating, resulting in fewer dairy products, an essential part of herder family diets. Furthermore, animals in poor condition will not produce meat that is palatable or saleable.

It is predicted that many families will lose all or most of their animals, and therefore their livelihood, and will be forced to move to the district (soum) and aimag centres, and to Ulaan Baatar, where there is already high unemployment. Their suffering will be exacerbated by a food shortage.

Many aimag and soum officials interviewed during the assessment stated that several families had been forced to migrate north with their animals in search of better areas to survive the winter. This began before winter and some families have travelled as far as 400 km. Families have been split as a result of this migration, with men travelling with the animals and women, children and the elderly moving to the soum centres. Some have said they have had little news of their families and are worried.

At this stage the Government is not intending to launch an international appeal, as the dzud is not affecting as many aimags as in 2000- 2001 winter. Hay is being delivered by the Government to some of the affected soums, but because of lack of fuel, cost, loss of transport animals and remoteness of some of the sites, many herders are not able to collect this assistance.

According to the Mongolian Red Crescent Society (MRCS) Secretary General, the Government may require assistance as the situation worsens.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent Action***

The Red Cross is planning meetings with other relief agencies, embassies and USAID to discuss the situation and possible interventions. The Red Cross is also in constant dialogue with the Government State Emergency Commission. MRCS branches at aimag and soum level are providing some assistance to families. They are offering psycho-social support and free medical care using the voluntary services of doctors. They are also distributing animal covers, candles, matches, and newspapers as well as letters of encouragement and support written by Red Cross Youth members for affected herder communities.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see [www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)

*For further details please contact :*

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- All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.*

*For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>*

*For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.*

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