

CHINA: FLOODS 1997

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The Disaster

The floodwaters that plague China every year have begun to spread across its southern and eastern regions as the monsoon made its dramatic seasonal debut in Hong Kong on 1 July. At least 12 provinces are now experiencing flooding although waters have not reached disaster proportions in all as of yet. Most severely affected are those in the Pearl River catchment area, including its tributaries the Xijiang and Beijiang Rivers. The affected provinces include Hong Kong, Shanghai, Sichuan, Hubei, Hunan, Zhejiang, Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangdong, Guangxi, Fujian, and Jiangxi.

More than 70 people have already died in the flooding. Over 14 million people are currently affected by the floods through death, injury, destruction to homes, inundation of farmland, closure of factories and damage to infrastructure. Approximately 1,000 people had to be evacuated from the Beijing-Kowloon passenger train when a landslide blocked its passage. As floodwaters rose, rail travel between Shanghai and Fujian Province was suspended due to water-covered tracks and weakened trestles.

Official figures are not yet available, but the Red Cross Society of China has obtained preliminary figures from three of the affected provinces.

Guangdong

- 3.2 million people affected
- 41 dead, thousands injured
- 11,170 rooms destroyed, 43,250 damaged
- 50 boxes of medicine and 300 quilts distributed from DP Centre
- direct economic loss 1.83 billion Yuan (CHF 320 m)

Guangxi

- 5.92 million people affected in 37 counties
- 29 dead, 8,125 injured
- 12,500 rooms destroyed, 98,700 damaged
- extensive damage to food crops
- direct economic loss 1.2 billion Chinese Yuan (CHF 209 m)

Zhejiang

- 5.14 million people affected
- 16 dead, thousands injured
- production halted in more than 7,000 factories
- relief supplies by local and provincial branches: quilts and medicine
- requested emergency funds from Headquarters

The Relief Department of the RCSC provided the following data on natural disasters (torrential rain, floods, hailstones, cyclones, earthquakes) in China during the first half of 1997:

The toll of natural disasters in China January to June 1997

- affected population 50,670,000
- 463 counties in 16 provinces
- dead 587 people, injured 19,620
- living in shelters 520,260
- rooms destroyed 274,870, rooms damaged 1,969,071
- farmland damaged 3,431,340 hectares
- direct economic loss of 17,914,860,000 Yuan (CHF 312 million)

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The impact of the floods are being monitored at the local, provincial, and national levels. From its headquarters in Beijing, the RCSC staff are keeping the Federation Secretariat informed. Weather forecasters in China predict exceptionally heavy rainfall this year as the monsoon season continues through August and into September. Already several provinces are reporting their worst flooding in nearly 50 years.

The RCSC has released funds to assist the provinces in meeting the needs of its beneficiaries. On 15 July, an assessment team from Headquarters will travel to several sites in the flooded area.

In Guangdong Province the staff of the Disaster Preparedness Centre in Guizhou prepared and delivered 300 quilts and 50 boxes of medicine (value 45,000 Yuan = CHF 7,800) to flood victims. The Guangxi Provincial Branch sent out medical teams comprising 42 individual medical and paramedical staff. Those in Zhejiang Province have sent medicine, quilts, and other relief materials to the flooded areas. Hong Kong Red Cross contributed 200,000 Yuan (CHF 35,000) to Guangdong Province Red Cross while staff and volunteers in the province raised another 250,000 Yuan (CHF 43,800) to purchase relief goods.

The Asia & Pacific Department continues to monitor weather patterns and reports utilising the Internet. For those interested in following the weather, here are sites suggestions:

GMS-5 infrared image of earth, cloud cover, storms <http://satfp.soest.hawaii.edu/gms.html>

Tropical storm tracking map <http://www.hawaii.edu/news/localweather/nwp.latest.gif>

Satellite image <http://www.intellicast.com/weather/intl/assat/>

Needs

Needs assessments are underway, however past experience identifies the need for food, medicines, disinfectants, clothing, and quilts.

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