

MONGOLIA: SNOWFALLS

25 February 2000

appeal no. 5/2000

situation report no. 1

period covered: 23 - 25 February 2000

In the face of continuing severe winter weather, the number of affected areas is growing and livestock deaths are climbing. Funds are urgently needed to purchase food and boots for the stricken herders and their families.

The context

Severe snowfalls in large areas of Mongolia have caused the death of over 800,000 head of livestock, the mainstay of the rural economy and the sole source of food for herders and their families. The early snowfall, starting in mid September, followed a severe drought and an infestation of field rats which deprived the livestock of essential fodder and weakened their resistance to the winter. The snow was interspersed with rain which then froze on the surface of the steppes, building up an underlying ice crust. The early snowfall also disrupted the herders' preparations for the winter, arriving at a time when they gather fodder for their livestock, dung for heating their gers (tents) and food for the winter months.

Some 291,618 people in 12 aimags are now affected by the food shortages in the short term, and by the loss of their livelihood in the longer term. The government and the Mongolian Red Cross (MRC) have already distributed emergency supplies in the worst affected areas, drawing on funds and goods donated locally. On 11 February Mongolia appealed for international aid. The operation for which this appeal seeks funding will provide food supplies for three months and winter boots to the worst affected herders and their families.

Latest events

The snowfalls are now rated as being the worst to affect Mongolia in 30 years. Large areas of the country are covered in up to 100 cm of snow. Currently the number of affected areas has risen to 92 soums in 12 aimags -- an increase in the figures given in the Appeal of 10 soums and one additional aimag. The worst hit areas are Bayangkhongor, Dundgobi and Zavkhan, Uverkhangai and Uvs. So far, three deaths have been reported as a direct result of the freezing weather.

Over the past week a further 7,650 households or 53,618 people have reportedly been affected by the ongoing disaster. The majority of the victims are herders and their families, who are now facing serious difficulties following the large scale losses of their animals. The Mongolian Red Cross has reports from its aimag branches that a further 300,000 livestock have perished, bringing the total to at least 818,500 head. The prognosis of the government is that the disaster situation will continue to worsen until summer

when the animals will again have enough grazing. The preliminary estimations show that in Ovorhangai aimag alone another 500,000 to 600,000 animals will be lost in the next few months. Recently, in the soums (counties) of Bayan, Bayan-Onjuul, Buren, Erdenesant, Bayantsagaan soums, south of Tov aimag, were particularly badly affected by heavy snow fall, some 20,000 thousand animals were lost.

The temperature has dropped further in the disaster areas, reaching 46 degrees below zero in Zavhan and Uvs aimags -- the coldest temperatures of the past ten years.

The herdsmen in the disaster areas are now physically exhausted after four months of coping with the disaster and the severe cold winter. The psychological impact of the loss of their valuable stock is also considerable. The MRCS reports that there has been an increase in the number of cases of malnutrition, exposure, conjunctivitis and hypertension.

Latest statistics showing the situation in the affected aimags

No.	aimag	affected soums	affected households	affected people	cattle losses per aimag as of 13 Feb	cattle losses per aimag as of 20 Feb
1	Dundgobi	15	8,200	56,900	158,000	293,800
2	Bayankhongor	6	4,500	29,250	60,000	78,800
3	Zavkhan	19	7,815	54,750	98,000	134,300
4	Uverkhangai	10	7,185	43,110	108,000	180,300
5	Uvs	11	5,860	41,020	64,000	99,900
6	Khuvsgul	5	3,100	24,800	10,000	17,200
7	Umnegobi	4	650	3,250	3,000	9,800
8	Dornogobi	4	450	2,800	2,000	4,500
9	Gobi-altai	2	140	798	700	1,900
10	Bulgan	5	2,810	14,050	900	18,200
11	Bayan-ulgii	3	210	1,050	700	9,900
12.	Tuv	8	3,800	19,840	--	41,900
	Total	92	44,550	291,618	505,300	818,500

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

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Red Cross volunteers in the aimag branches have been mobilised to assist with the distribution of relief to the most vulnerable. Relief stocks from the headquarters of the MRC in Ulaanbaataar are now being distributed to the southern aimags. A total of MNT 9.7 million (USD 9,000) worth of assistance, mainly in the form of warm clothes, food stuffs, candles and matches, has been distributed to date.

The Federation has released CHF 100,000 from its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund for the procurement of relief supplies.

Federation Delegation •

A senior field delegate will arrive in Mongolia next week to assist the MRC with its planning activities. He will be supported by the East Asia Regional Office in Beijing.

Government Action w

The Government has drawn up emergency plans for the co-ordination of relief efforts in the affected aimags. These will encompass the co-ordination of assistance both from internal and external sources. So far, the government has distributed 2,500 tonnes of hay and 480 tonnes of fodder to 12 aimags. Some of the funds raised by the national appeal will be used in the rehabilitation phase to replenish herds. An exact figure of the funds received through this appeal has not yet been published.

The Government is looking into the possibility of releasing additional relief stocks through the State Emergency Fund. Some essential medicines have been delivered to the aimags by helicopter.

Other Agency Relief Efforts •

The UN through OCHA has recently pledged a total of \$ 88,250 of aid to the affected areas.

Outstanding needs

Food and boots remain the main need for disaster affected communities. Funds are urgently required to purchase these items within the country.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The Delegation in Beijing is in contact with the UN Disaster Management team (UNDMT) in Ulaan baatar. It has given a number of interviews to the international media (as has the Federation Secretariat in Geneva) and has assisted an AP-TV film team travelling to Mongolia to obtain coverage of the devastated areas. Further trips from the international media based in Beijing are expected next week.

Contributions

No contributions have been received so far.

For further information, please contact Marcel Fortier, Desk Officer, on +41 22 730 4268 (e:mail: fortier@ifrc.org).

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
Operations Funding & Reporting Department

Hiroshi Higashiura
Director
Asia & Pacific Department

