

# **MONGOLIA - SNOWFALLS**

9 March 2000

*appeal no. 5/2000*

*situation report no. 2*

*period covered: 1 - 7 March 2000*

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*Thanks to a speedy response to the appeal, the Mongolian Red Cross Society can begin the purchase of 160 mts. of basic foodstuffs for 2,000 herder families and winter boots. Distribution of aid supplied from in country sources is already under way. The development of the situation in the affected aimags, in particular its effect on diet and food security, is being carefully monitored .*

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## ***The context***

Severe snowfalls in large areas of Mongolia have caused the death of over a million head of livestock, the mainstay of the rural economy and the sole source of food for herders and their families. Over 300,000 people in 13 Aimags are affected by the food shortages in the immediate term, and by the loss of their livelihood in the longer term. The government and the Mongolian Red Cross Society (MRCS) 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 State Emergency Commission in Mongolia has recently confirmed that 80 Soums (counties) in 12 Aimags have been designated as emergency sites. The government is currently measuring the impact almost exclusively on the basis of the number of dead livestock. Unconfirmed reports, as of 1 March, indicate that more than 1.3 million animals (cattle, sheep and goats) have died and that many households have lost 60 - 70 % of their herds. The worst hit areas are Bayankhongor, Dundgobi, Zavkhan, Uverkhangai and Uvs Aimags.

An estimated 300,000 herders and their families are now facing serious difficulties following the large scale loss of their animals. To put this into context, 30% of Mongolia's total population of 2.4 million are nomadic herders. Each nomadic family needs some 250 mixed livestock to be self-supporting. If this number falls below 150, then a family is considered to be living below the poverty line.

Traditionally, the nomadic population live on a diet high in meat and dairy products and supplemented by wheat, millet or rice. With the continued loss of livestock, this diet is likely to change and there are concerns that such a dramatic change could adversely affect the health and nutritional status of the population. In addition, dried animal dung is used for heating and the loss of animals is now depriving herders of an important source of fuel over the winter months.

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At present, there are no indications of a critical food shortage, but this must be expected in the coming months and probably as soon as the end of March or early April. Last year's extended drought in large parts of the currently affected area left the herds in bad condition and the herders were not able to prepare and store sufficient winter fodder during the autumn months. Added to which, the animals are unable to break through the crust of ice and snow on the ground to find grazing.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent action***

### **Phase 1: February - mid March 2000**

#### ***Plan of Action 1***

A transfer of CHF 80,000 from the Federation's DREF (Disaster Relief Emergency Fund) and the first contributions from sister National Societies and other sources will enable the Federation\MRCS to implement the first plan of action which will include procurement of the following, as well as support costs for transportation, monitoring and communications:

Flour	110 metric tons
Rice	27.5 metric tons
Millet	27.5 metric tons
Boots	600 pairs

The Federation\MRCS will target 2,200 families (altogether 16,250 people) in Dundgobi, Bayankhongor, Uverkhangai, Zavkhan and Uvs Aimags to receive a supplementary food distribution of 50 kilograms of flour and 25 kilograms of either rice or millet.

Supplies will largely be purchased in the main Aimag towns to cut down on transportation costs and time, given the large distances between Ulaan Baatar and some of the affected Aimags. In addition, 600 pairs of boots will be distributed to a selected number of families in Dundgobi, Zavkhan and Uverkhangai Aimags.

The programme will be implemented by MRCS members and volunteers in the respective Aimags. Representatives from the MRCS headquarters will be charged with supervising the operation in each Aimag and preparing consolidated distribution reports.

The MRCS Branches in the Aimags are currently carrying out an intensive assessment of needs which will be forwarded to the headquarters in Ulaan Baatar this week. Based on this and weekly disaster reports from the Red Cross Aimag Branches, the MRCS headquarters is able to update its weekly situation and assessment reports. Through the distribution of relief items, the MRCS will continue the ongoing monitoring process and assessment of the situation and needs. These findings will be reflected in the second phase of the joint operation.

The MRCS launched its own national appeal among its members, volunteers and supporters to assist the affected areas and as a result has so far distributed assistance worth USD 17,430 in the form of warm clothes, foodstuffs, candles, and matches to 1,300 households in 4 Aimags.

#### **Federation Delegation •**

A senior Federation relief delegate arrived in Mongolia at the beginning of March for a three week mission to work closely with the MRCS in drawing up the first plan of action for the emergency operation and to liaise with other humanitarian organisations. A replacement delegate from the Japanese Red Cross has already been identified and will arrive in country in mid March.

Support is also being provided by the Federation's Regional Office in Beijing and its Regional Delegation in Kuala Lumpur.

#### **National Action w**

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#### **National Action w**

In addition to launching a national appeal for assistance, the government of Mongolia is now appealing for international assistance in the form of food, clothes, medicines and fodder for the remaining livestock. The Aimag Emergency Commissions are providing situation updates on a regular basis for government authorities and international organisations.

#### **Other Agency Relief Efforts •**

UNICEF led a disaster fact-finding mission to Dundgobi province at the end of February and a report on its findings has now been completed. The OCHA Regional Disaster Response Advisor for Asia joined a UN Disaster Management Team (UNDMT) inter-agency assessment mission to the most affected areas in the first week of March and will co-ordinate the UN response.

The recognised need to strengthen co-ordination amongst the international humanitarian community is now being facilitated by the UN Disaster Management Team in co-operation with the Mongolian government. UNDMT plan to use two consultants (an international and a national consultant) to assist in co-ordinating the relief response and to facilitate the collection and analysis of data from the government, UN agencies, NGOs and national and international humanitarian organisations. The Federation\MRCS will feed into this process.

### ***Outstanding needs***

A change in the composition of the food basket provided by the Federation may be necessary due to the large quantities of meat and dairy products usually consumed which cannot be substituted by carbohydrates. The latter can only be seen as an essential supplement. The Federation will continue to closely monitor the situation and to make recommendations.

The situation is generally expected to deteriorate by the end of March when winter food stocks will be exhausted. Funds are urgently needed to enable the Federation\MRCS to respond to the increasingly difficult situation facing the stricken population.

### ***External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media***

A combined BBC\Daily Telegraph team travelled with the MRCS to Dundgobi Aimag at the beginning of March to collect information and to shoot footage in the affected areas. The Regional Office in Beijing and the Federation Office in Mongolia have been fielding enquiries from the media and interested Embassies and providing information and updates as required.

A representative from the Regional Office in Beijing attended a briefing in Beijing by the UNICEF Assistant Representative in Mongolia, for interested Embassies, UN agencies and humanitarian organisations. The Federation delegate based in Ulaan Baatar is liaising with UN agencies and Embassies.

### ***Contributions***

See Annex 1.

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

Peter Rees-Gildea  
Director, Operations Funding & Reporting Dept

Hiroshi Higashiura  
Director, Asia & Pacific Dept

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