

CHINA : FLOODS

6 September 1996

appeal no. 10/96

situation report no. 3

period covered: 21 August - 6 September 1996

Further flooding in China, this time along the banks of the Yellow River, has forced large numbers of people from their homes and left the population in the six affected provinces in urgent need of medical care, food, shelter and clothing . The Red Cross Society of China, already assisting victims of the earlier Yangtze River floods, has drawn up a plan of action for the six provinces. This formed the basis of the revised appeal for CHF 5,442,000 on 28 August 1996.

The context

After widespread flooding in July, torrential monsoon rains and a series of typhoons, most notably Typhoon Herb in early August, caused further damage in Northwest, South and Central China. As a result of this new destruction, six more provinces -- Fujian, Hebei, Henan, Shanxi, Shandong and Xinjiang Provinces -- were included in the revised appeal launched on 28 August.

Latest events

Although the torrential rains have abated, it is still raining in South and Central China. The area around the Yellow River and its tributaries was particularly badly affected by rain, hail and strong winds. As a result, the areas between major dikes of the Yellow River were completely flooded as dikes were breached or land sacrificed to save large population centres downstream. This led to the evacuation of hundred of thousands of people from a strip of land 5 to 10 kilometres wide and hundreds of kilometres long. While water levels have dropped 1 to 2 metres in places, the water remains up to 2 metres deep in some areas.

The Yellow River (approximately 4,800 km/3,000 miles long) gets its name from the nutrient rich yellow loess (silt) that it carries down from the mountains and deposits in the plains. In the natural course of events, agricultural lands are renewed through the flooding process. During the monsoon season, the river can become several kilometres wide. The heavy rains this season filled the riverbed and spilled over dikes. Fortunately, some of the population living in the plain had some warning of the approaching floods and were able to grab a few belongings and small amounts of food as they fled. Many buildings constructed on the sandy soil of the plains were damaged or destroyed, crops were washed away and livestock perished.

In Shandong Province, 12 million people are affected by the Yellow River flooding, with over 300,000 surrounded by flood-waters. More than 30,000 people were evacuated to safe ground. The disaster left 24 people dead, 7 missing and over 1,600 injured. Over 600,000 rooms were damaged or destroyed. Most medical care focused on gastrointestinal problems, skin infections and respiratory illnesses.

In Henan Province all three tributaries of the Yellow River flooded, pouring into the Yellow River, which in turn overflowed. The floods killed 246 people and 18,000 head of livestock, and affected altogether over 7.8 million people and 8 million hectares of land. A total of 472,000 people were evacuated. The economic loss in both provinces was extensive.

The Yangtze River (5200 km/3200 miles long) flows more swiftly than the Yellow River. It is reported to have the third largest discharge of water in the world. Deeper, with less silt deposit, it can be navigated for hundreds of miles. Higher concentrations of people live along its banks. While it is less prone to flooding, when this occurs -- as this July -- it usually affects more people and causes more damage than the Yellow River.

The RCSC relief operation in the provinces along the Yangtze -- the initial focus of the Federation appeal -- is in full swing as additional supplies of disinfectants, medicine, food, clothing, and quilts are being procured and distributed. The RCSC Medical Teams, in co-operation with the Department of Public Health, are continuing to provide medical care and sanitation services to flood victims.

Red Cross Society of China action

Red Cross Society of China Headquarters •

The Red Cross Society of China (RCSC) assessment team has just returned from Shandong and Henan Provinces after a week touring the affected areas. While the team was in the field, the RCSC Relief Department kept in close contact with all of the affected provinces, providing overall co-ordination, and logistical and financial support.

RCSC Headquarters staff will accompany the Federation Reporting/Monitoring Delegate to Anhui and Jiangxi Provinces. Additional trips are being scheduled to allow the Delegate to monitor the operation in most, if not all of the affected provinces.

Red Cross Society of China Branches •

Branches of the RCSC in all of the affected provinces have been involved in monitoring the situation at the local level, providing support in the form of disinfectants, medicine, food and clothing, as well as co-ordinating donations and fund-raising campaigns.

Red Cross Society of China Medical Teams •

Thousands of RCSC and Public Health medical teams have been working in the flooded areas since the outbreak of the disaster, providing medical treatment to the affected population and carrying out preventive health measures that include supervising sanitation and disinfecting water supplies.

International Federation •

The Federation Information Delegate provided Beijing-based international media with reports on the situation in Xinjiang, Hubei and Hunan Provinces. Numerous requests for interviews followed and the RCSC and Federation were highlighted in many media reports.

The Federation Reporting/Monitoring Delegate is working closely with the RCSC and travelled with the assessment team from RCSC headquarters to Shandong and Henan provinces.

Outstanding needs

The RCSC reports that medicine, disinfectants, food, temporary shelter and clothing are still badly needed for all the affected provinces. In many areas in Shandong and Henan, both local Red Cross and Public Health Bureau officials have emphasised the acute need for and shortage of disinfectants and medicine.

A plan of action for the additional six provinces, based upon the revised appeal of 28 August, has been prepared by the RCSC. Procurement will be done within each province by the RCSC staff. Rice will be shipped to the distribution points and handed over to beneficiaries by the local RCSC staff and volunteers. Medical teams will dispense medicine and utilise the disinfectants as they sanitise public and residential areas.

Beneficiaries will be selected by the RCSC after consultation with local community leaders and government officials.

DISTRIBUTION PLAN FOR THE 6 ADDITIONAL PROVINCES				
PROVINCE	DISINFECTANTS RMB Value	MEDICINE RMB Value	RICE RMB Value	TOTAL RMB Value
FUJIAN	400,000	400,000	400,000	1,200,000
HEBEI	500,000	500,000	700,000	1,700,000
HENAN	300,000	300,000	400,000	1,000,000
SHANDONG	250,000	250,000	300,000	800,000
SHANXI	250,000	250,000	300,000	800,000
XINJIANG	300,000	300,000	600,000	1,200,000
TOTAL	2,000,000	2,000,000	2,700,000	RMB = 6,700,000 (CHF = 1,000,000)
BENEFICIARIES	400,000	66,667	58,065	

See Annex 1 for the revised appeal budget.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The Federation Reporting/Monitoring Delegate and the RCSC have had numerous contacts with Chinese government officials as well as the international media, while the monitoring team was briefed by senior government officials and staff of the Public Health Bureau in each province.

The Federation delegate has also paid courtesy calls on a number of embassies in Beijing and has had a series of meetings with ECHO representatives.

Contributions

Contributions and pledges of CHF 3,391,043 plus the reallocation of CHF 149,960 from past disasters represent 62% coverage of the revised appeal of CHF 5,442,000.

See Annex 2 for details.

Conclusion

The situation throughout the flood affected provinces remains serious. Flooding of vast tracts of land along the Yellow River has displaced hundreds of thousands of people and caused tremendous damage to homes and livelihoods. Local Red Cross and Public Health Bureau resources are stretched to the limit and require assistance, particularly in the form of disinfectants, medicine and food. Cash donations are urgently needed.

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