

CHINA: EARTHQUAKE IN HEBEI PROVINCE

24 March 1998

appeal no. 3/98

situation report no. 3

period covered: February - mid-March 1998

Distribution of relief items to earthquake victims is under way. All winter clothes needs listed in the appeal have been met. Planning is now beginning for rehabilitation work.

The context

On 10 January a 6.2 Richter magnitude earthquake hit Hebei Province, seriously affecting some 700 villages. The National Society, supported by the Federation, immediately started relief assistance, despite harsh winter weather that hampered the operations.

Latest events

During the reporting period, the RCSC/Federation relief operation proceeded in accordance with the plan indicated in the Appeal. The emergency phase is now completed and the situation is slowly returning to normal. Currently the Federation Representative and the Red Cross Society of China (RCSC) Director of Relief are in the earthquake area completing a plan of action for the next phase.

All the homeless families were accommodated in temporary shelters and their immediate basic needs of food and clothing covered by assistance from the government/RCSC in time for the Chinese New Year, from 18 January till early February, thus enabling them to join in celebrating this festival, the most important of the year, despite the extremely cold weather.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

The preparatory work for establishing Red Cross centres in the quake affected areas continues. Pre-selection of the sites has just been finished and quotations obtained for the prefabricated buildings and equipment/furniture. CHF 73,397 (RMB 410,500) is being allocated to the project and procurement has begun.

A delegation composed of the RCSC Relief Department and the Federation Representative visited the Zhangjiakou RC branch 12-14 March and was escorted to four destroyed villages in the area. Devastation in these four villages was total, with only very low walls of dwellings still standing. Although the measured shock was 6.2 Richter, the actual shock, according to local officials, was most likely closer to 8 at the epicentre, which was within 1 km of these four villages. Villagers continue with makeshift repairs in bitter sub-zero weather.

Construction material has been moved into the area and large stacks of brick are in position. One of the four villages visited has been selected by the Hong Kong branch to be completely rebuilt several hundred metres from the original site.

A Hong Kong RC work team headed by its Secretary General made another visit to the affected disaster areas and a joint meeting was held in Beijing to map out the action plan for the next rehabilitation phase.

Procurements/distributions •

An offer of 884 winter jackets, donated by two clothing companies in Japan through the Japanese Red Cross, was received. These goods are valued at more than CHF 79,177 (JPY 7 million). An additional offer of 400 cartons of men's jackets has been accepted from the American Red Cross, which is also providing some medical supplies for DP stocks.

CHF 138,785 (RMB 776,204) has been spent on assorted medicines which were distributed by the Zhangjiadou Prefecture Red Cross branch for use by Red Cross medical teams and local hospitals and dispensaries.

Three 4WD vehicles, manufactured locally, were procured. As per the plan, two vehicles are being used by the local Red Cross branches in the relief operation in the affected areas, and the third remains at RCSC Headquarters for the use of the Federation delegate and RCSC staff.

CHF 33,078 (RMB 185,000) is being allocated for the local procurement of 10 sets of generators as per the appeal budget.

The distribution of 6,000 stoves and 540 tons of rice funded by the Hong Kong RC were completed. Further purchase and distribution of rice and other items are under way.

Parallel to the earthquake operation, CHF 786,720 (RMB 4.4 million) was raised to support snow storm relief by RCSC branches in Tibet and Qinghai province. The relief goods -- food, medical supplies and warm clothing -- are being transported from Lhasa to the affected areas for distribution, despite the difficulties caused by cold weather, long distances and extremely poor road conditions.

Outstanding needs

The delegation mentioned above also visited the medical facilities in Zangjiakou which were the first emergency units to respond to the disaster. These medical facilities and their personnel were themselves significantly affected by the earthquake. While immediate relief needs of the victims in the destroyed villages have been met, the Zangjiakou hospital complex had to evacuate completely the traditional medical clinic which, although still standing, has suffered major structural damage. This is considered a first line care facility essential to the medical response capability of the community. Other buildings, including the sterilisation unit and X-ray unit, have sustained major structural damage but continue to operate, although unsafe, because of the medical urgency. Local RCSC and government officials consider rehabilitation of these hospital facilities to be a priority. Zhangjiakou RC branch reports that since most contributions in kind received so far have been in the form of winter clothing and quilts or blankets, all needs for these items are now covered. The RCSC will allocate funds earmarked in the appeal budget for these two items to the rehabilitation programme, which according to the local government and Red Cross is now a priority.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

There has been very positive media coverage of the Red Cross relief operation from the start. The RCSC/Federation operation was widely reported on national and local TV and radio and in the press. The RCSC web site dedicated to this disaster has been well received.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The RCSC has started the procurement and distribution of supplementary food for the targeted population of 50,000. Local government and community authorities are being consulted about the procurement and transportation of rice/wheat flour and the identification of distribution areas and beneficiaries. This is co-ordinated with the food aid project funded by the Hong Kong Red Cross branch of RCSC, to avoid any overlapping. More details will be shared by the National Society with the Secretariat as they become available.

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