

CHINA: EARTHQUAKE IN HEBEI PROVINCE

17 June 1997

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period covered: 15 May - 17 June 1998

Reconstruction projects, including ECHO-funded projects, are now making rapid progress. The deadline for completion is late summer, before the bad weather sets in.

The context

On 10 January a 6.2 Richter magnitude earthquake struck Hebei Province, seriously affecting some 700 villages, mostly in the counties of Zhangbei and Wanquan Counties of Zhangjiakou Prefecture. The Red Cross Society of China (RCSC), supported by the Federation, immediately provided emergency assistance, completed in late January. Reconstruction and rehabilitation of village dwellings and essential Red Cross structures began as soon as the weather permitted .

Latest events

On 3 June, Zhangbei County experienced two more aftershocks of more than 4.0 on the Richter scale. No casualties were reported and only minor damage to some old structures was sustained.

On 16 and 17 May, the Federation Representative, the Director of the RCSC Relief Department and the Deputy Head of the International Department escorted two ECHO representatives and a member of the European Union Delegation in Beijing to the earthquake zone. In the village of Luan Shi of Zhangbei County, they observed an ECHO funded wheat flour distribution to 320 beneficiaries (500 MT). In the village of Tailugou, Zhangbei, they viewed an ECHO-funded RCSC community hospital which is under construction. As they travelled through Wanquan County, they saw numerous earthquake damaged villages in various stages of recovery. In Liang Ji Zhuang, Wanquan, they visited an ECHO funded Red Cross post and met with its director, who is responsible for the emergency medical care of approximately 20,000 beneficiaries in 40 surrounding villages. Next to the Red Cross post they noted that groundwork had begun on an ECHO funded community hospital (30 beds).

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

The local branch of the RCSC has begun supplementary food distributions of wheat flour (500 MT) to the 320 inhabitants of Luan Shi village. The food is intended to assist villagers through the late planting season, when they must work long hours in the fields and in addition continue rebuilding their homes.

The distributions are the first of a supplementary food project targeting 50,000 beneficiaries and financed by an ECHO grant.

Although steady progress in reconstruction is evident, work is behind schedule because of a late start. Most projects could not begin until April because of lingering winter conditions. The village of Luan Shi was previously visited by the Federation Representative in the second week of March; he reports an impressive difference in the intervening weeks. During the first visit, this village was still badly damaged and inhabitants were living in makeshift housing in the rubble. Now all the rubble has been cleared away and new brick, earthquake-resistant dwellings are two-thirds complete.

In the village of Tailugou a new Red Cross hospital facility, replacing the old hospital, which was badly cracked by the quake, was nearly half completed within the space of ten days. This facility of 15 beds provides basic medical care for approximately 15,000 beneficiaries in the quake zone. RCSC medical personnel report a general increase in cases of communicable diseases, particularly respiratory infections, as a result of the population's exposure to the elements in the post-quake period.

Outstanding needs

The construction of Red Cross facilities and village dwellings must be completed by late summer since winter starts very early in this region.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The local media gave wide coverage in newspapers and on television to the ECHO visit. Local Government officials in the earthquake stricken counties expressed their gratitude to the donors.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

After a long delayed start, reconstruction is making good progress. The population in partnership with the RCSC is showing remarkable determination to recover from the disaster. Of continuing concern is the harvest yet to be realised from the late planting season.

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