

CHINA: FLOODS

27 July 1998

appeal no. 21/98

situation report no. 1

period covered: 20 - 27 July 1998

The situation in China continues to be alarming, with communities struggling to protect dams and dikes in the face of unrelenting rain and rising river levels. Millions have been effected, and the economic cost runs into the billions of Swiss francs. Local fund-raising efforts are proving successful, to an extent, but major international support is needed to bring prompt relief to the millions affected by this catastrophe.

The context

Continuous rains since March have caused flooding and affected millions of people in 20 provinces of China. In many areas the floods are now described as the worst in living memory. According to official figures more than 1,000 people have died, 2.9 million houses have been destroyed and nine million hectares of crops and farmlands have been washed away or damaged.

This year over 240 million people in the country have been affected by natural disasters - more than 60% (140 million) by the floods.

Meteorological forecasts predict that the flood season will continue until September and indicate that heavy rains and summer typhoons may exacerbate the disaster.

Latest events

While the situation in the Sichuan and Guanxi provinces has stabilised, conditions continue to worsen along the Yangtze river in the provinces of Hubei, Hunan and Jiangxi. This region is suffering under historically high crests and flood volumes, second only to the devastating deluge of 1954, according to local experts. So far this month, two crests have pummelled the Yangtze river along the rain belt, worsening the floods along the middle and lower reaches of the river, hitting the Hubei, Hunan, and Jiangxi Provinces the worst. More than half of the river's stretch is above record levels, and still more dangers lurk in the days ahead, where high water has been soaking thousands of kilometres of levees and embankments of the Yangtze River for over a month.

Special attention has been paid during the last few days to the situation in the provincial capital of Wuhan (Hubei Province) with its seven million inhabitants. Wuhan, a meeting-point of the north-south and east-west railways and a major city along the Yangtze, is protected by a lake dam and a 400 km long levee. Both were in danger of breaking when water levels in the river reached 27.69 metres on Wednesday, 0.26 metres above the emergency mark, but thanks to the efforts of more than 700,000 people struggling to reinforce dams and dikes, and a temporary cessation of the rain, a major disaster was avoided. However, Wuhan was flooded by heavy rain and thousands had to be relocated.

In the Western part of Hunan provinces more than 600 mm of rain fell between 20-23 July making the Youn Jiang River rise to its highest level in history, causing severe flooding. The Youn Jiang is a tributary of the Yangtze via Dongting Lake in the Northern part of the Hunan Province, an area described as one of the "rice-chambers" of China.

Close monitoring of rainfall and water flow by Chinese meteorological and hydrological stations have made it possible to predict the peak of flood levels along the rivers and to take as many preventive measures as possible. Work along the enormous Three Gorges Dam has been temporarily suspended three times due to extensive water flow.

In the next 48 hours another peak is expected, threatening Hubei and Hunan provinces. The central government last week called upon provinces and cities along the Yangtze river to introduce emergency measures by preparing for major relief operations and to spare no efforts in the protection of dams and dikes.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Provincial branches of Red Cross Society of China (RCSC) have been in operation since the onset of the disaster, assisting local authorities in their relief efforts.

524 medical teams, each comprising 8-10 doctors, nurses and assistants, are working in the areas covered by the appeal, providing medical treatment and sanitation work, in close co-operation with the Public Health Bureau. Volunteers have assisted in protection of dams and dikes - i.e. near Wuhan where thousands of Red Cross volunteers are active in trying to prevent the dams from breaking.

Food, clothes and medicine have been distributed from Disaster Preparedness centres. This is far from enough, but all provincial branches are actively involved in local fund-raising to continue distribution and assist victims. Local fund-raising by RCSC in some of the most affected areas have raised relief items (medicine, quilts, food) worth 1.72 million RMB (CHF 310,000).

The Red Cross Society of China (RCSC) headquarters has allocated RMB 150,000 (CHF 27,270) in cash and medicines/medical equipment from a World Children's Foundation donation to the disaster areas.

The first priority is the procurement of basic foodstuffs and the ensuring of safe water by supplying water purification tablets to families included in the appeal. Initially, CHF 250,000 worth of tablets will be distributed in the Jiangxi, Guanxi, Hunan, Fujian and Sichuan Provinces.

While the total death toll from the floods disaster has passed 1,100, official government figures (through RCSC) give the following casualties for the severely affected provinces of Guanxi, Hunan, Jiangxi, Sichuan, Fujian and Hubei :

Affected population:	77,850,000
Dead:	831 persons
Injured:	143,198 persons
Homeless:	804,000 persons
Economic loss:	Estimated at RMB 44.4 billion (CHF 8 billion)

A task force of five senior staff has been set up to manage operational activities, organise logistics, fund-raising and international relations. Two out of three Federation delegates have arrived (Federation representative and information-reporting delegate). A field delegate is expected to arrive early this week. Technical assistance in financial management and information/media is being provided by the regional delegation in Kuala Lumpur.

Outstanding needs

The needs following the latest worsening of the floods are enormous. Together with food, water purification tablets, basic medical supplies, sanitation materials are top priorities, especially in the Jiangxi, Hunan and now also Hubei provinces.

The procurement of relief supplies will be made in China by the RCSC at provincial level. Lines of supply have already been opened at national and provincial levels.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The launch of the appeal resulted in extensive media coverage in China and abroad. Chinese media cover with the flood situation on a daily basis, as do major international media.

The appeal has also been distributed to selected agencies, embassies and private companies in China.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

As stated the needs are enormous and will continue to rise, along with flood levels. Donor support is urgently needed, and more information can be had from Marcel Fortier, Desk Officer, on ++4122 7394268; email: fortier@ifrc.org

Peter Rees-Gildea
 Director
 Operations Funding and Reporting Department

Hiroshi Higashiura
 Director
 Asia & Pacific Department

CHINA - FLOODS

APPEAL No. 21/98

**PLEDGES
 RECEIVED**

27/07/98

DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE
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CASH

REQUESTED IN APPEAL		6,770,000	
CANADIAN - RC	50,000 CAD	51,230	15/07/62
CANADIAN - RC	100,000 CAD	102,460	20/07/98
BRITISH - RC/GOVT	150,000 GBP	368,070	25/07/98
DANISH - RC/GOVT	500,000 DKK	108,500	24/07/98
ECHO	360,900 XEU		APPLI
ICELAND - RC	200,000 ISK	41,870	20/07/98
NORWEGIAN RC/GOVT	1,500,000 NOK	293,370	03/01/00
NORWEGIAN - RC	150,000 NOK	29,337	23/07/98
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN CASH		994,837 CHF	

KIND AND SERVICES (INCL. PERSONNEL)

DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE
CANADIAN - RC	1 DEL X 10 WEEKS			12,500	
BRITISH - RC	1 DEL X 6 MONTHS			30,000	
DANISH - RC	1 DEL X 3 MONTHS			15,000	
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN KIND/SERVICES				57,500 CHF	

NOT REQUESTED IN APPEAL

DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED				0.00 CHF	