

CHINA: FLOODS

15 October 1999

appeal no. 17/99

situation report no. 4

period covered: 1 September - 11 October 1999

Field delegates of the International Federation working in China, together with colleagues from the Red Cross Society of China and its branches, have carried out field missions to the four provinces - Jiangxi, Hubei, Hunan and Anhui - targeted in the Emergency Appeal. Procurement and distribution of rice has begun according to Plan of Action I, but further funding towards the Appeal is needed to meet all the objectives of the operation.

The context

Sustained rainfall since the middle of June has been responsible for flooding along the upper and middle reaches of the Yangtze river in China. According to official figures from 5 August 1999 over 800 people have died and 24,000 were injured as a result of this year's floods and 5.5 million have been displaced throughout the country. Four provinces in particular - Jiangxi, Hubei, Hunan and Anhui - have been most affected by the recurrent flooding of the Yangtze river. In these provinces, Red Cross branches estimate some 60 million people have been put at risk, while 1.8 million have been evacuated from their homes.

Metrological forecasts indicated that further rainfall will fall, and the recent flash floods in Hunan and Hong Kong, as well as the torrential rainstorm in Zhejiang, indicate how volatile the situation remains.

Based on the findings of joint assessment teams, formed of representatives from the International Federation, the Red Cross Society of China (RCSC) headquarters and the Hong Kong branch, the Emergency Appeal was revised on 24 August. It is now seeking CHF 10.2 million to ensure more than one million people have access to clean water and sanitation materials for two months, and provide food assistance to whole communities worst hit by the disaster (approximately 250,000 people). The Federation will concentrate its relief effort on assisting the worst hit areas in the Jiangxi, Hubei, Hunan and Anhui provinces.

Latest events

Local authorities have reported that 70 people were killed in flash floods in Hunan on 13 August, and 80 seriously wounded. Chinese media stated on Monday, 6 September, that 133 were killed in a rainstorm in Zhejiang province over the weekend, and 59 people were missing. Water levels in the Yangtze river have receded somewhat in the past few weeks, but still remain 4-5 metres high. It was reported that over the last three weeks the water level of the lakes and low lying areas in Hubei Province had only receded by 30 cm, with the levels in the main lakes remaining at a height of 17 metres. Continued heavy rainfall has also caused some fluctuation in water levels, and authorities have stated that torrential rain last week in Hunan had raised the water levels of the Yangtze river in the district of Yiyang by one metre. This seems to be the case in some other areas in the other three provinces. Authorities fear that the waters will not recede completely until the end of November. The risk of outbreak of waterborne diseases remains high, as camps are surrounded by stagnant polluted water, and sanitary conditions are inadequate.

Hunan/Jiangxi provinces w

Approximately 14 million people were affected by this year's floods in Hunan province, 135,000 were made homeless, and 45 were killed. The most severe flooding occurred in the Dongting Lake area, where some communities suffered far more severe losses this year compared to the last five years. Water levels remain high due to recurrent rainfall, and have in some instances risen by one metre. Flash floods in the south of the province, an area more prone to drought during this time of year further stretched the resources of the Hunan branch of the Chinese Red Cross, which together with local authorities carried out an extensive relief operation in the aftermath of the disaster. More than 18,400 people were made homeless in a matter of hours in the city of Chen Zhou. All major health centres in the city were flooded and expensive medical equipment in the Red Cross hospital was seriously damaged or destroyed. Eleven thousand hectares of rice crops were lost, robbing hundreds of people of their livelihood. According to local Red Cross officials, aid is still desperately needed, prompting the already overwhelmed branch in Hunan to seek additional assistance from the International Federation.

In Jiangxi province, almost four million people have been affected by the floods, 160,000 made homeless and 23 have died. The rivers Changjiang, Le An, and Xinjiang in the northern part of the province have turned into lakes as dykes along the embankments burst late in July. In both Hunan and Jiangxi the people made homeless by the floods have sought shelter in camps provided by the government or been relocated elsewhere by local authorities. Food remains to be the highest priority.

Hubei/Anhui provinces w

A Federation Field delegate has recently returned from assessing the situation in Anhui and Hubei, one of two visits during this reporting period. In the affected areas water levels remain high and fluctuating, and have receded only in a few instances. Over half a million people remain homeless in Hubei, many of whom have been provided with tents from the government, and live along the dykes close to their homes - some of which have been swept away by water. The most vulnerable, including elderly and children, have been moved into temporary collective shelters organised by the government. The Field delegate visited a number of these shelters, some of which are situated in warehouses, housing up to 50 families. Other victims have moved in with their families, away from the flooded areas. Those victims that had been temporarily sheltered in schools, have now been moved due to the start of the new term.

Stagnant polluted water poses a serious health threat, and sanitary conditions are still generally poor. Food, water purification tablets and sanitation materials are cited as the main priorities.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

The Red Cross action has to date been mostly limited to operating health clinics set up in temporary shelter areas as well as dispatching mobile teams of doctors and nurses to villages cut off by deep flood waters. Outbreaks of epidemics such as cholera and other waterborne diseases have been kept at bay, despite poor sanitary conditions, and the most common ailments presently treated are respiratory infections, skin diseases, and diarrhoea.

Two Federation field delegates have visited the four targeted provinces on two occasions, and will continue to monitor the progress of relief operations currently underway - travelling between Beijing and the respective provinces.

The Red Cross Society of China, the Hong Kong branch, and the Macao Red Cross, are expected to continue assisting victims in many of the other provinces affected, and local Red Cross branches have also carried out relief interventions in the provinces recently struck by heavy rainstorms.

Procurement is proceeding according to Plan of Action I, with the purchase of 320 metric tonnes of rice now completed. Recent visits to the provinces by the Federation delegates evaluated the procurement, transportation and distribution activities of this first phase of the relief programme finding that the procurement procedures followed standard practices. The distribution of the rice is proceeding efficiently with the suppliers delivering the goods close to the point of distribution, where the rice is then transported by boat or truck to the final distribution point. The Federation's field delegates were able to visit a number of the distribution sites and were able to report that these were well organised, with each beneficiary required to sign or use a thumb print as proof of receipt.

The procurement for Plan of Action II, which seeks to supply the targeted provinces with stocks of sanitation materials and water purification tablets, is close to being finalised after an extensive tendering operation. These goods are now being received in the provinces for onward distribution to the worst affected areas.

More comprehensive Plans of Action have been formalised with the RCSC, and transfers of funds from Geneva are likely over the coming two weeks to enable larger stocks of relief materials to be purchased to support the operation.

Outstanding needs

According to local Red Cross officials the highest demand is for food, since emergency assistance was only provided for one month by the Chinese authorities. Although the victims have access to water, it is not always clean enough for consumption. The danger of using stagnant polluted water is well understood by the victims, although often due to necessity, people are still taking supplies directly from the rivers and lakes. Latrines seem to be lacking in the camps visited in Hunan and Jiangxi, indicating that sanitation continues to be a concern, and there is still a desperate need for sanitation supplies.

Although this year's floods are believed to be less severe than last year's, many communities have suffered more losses now than in previous years. Furthermore, many of those worst hit have experienced flooding three to five years in a row and farmers have once again lost both crops of rice, depriving them and their families of their income base. Whilst food is available through government loan schemes, many of these people can simply not afford to pay their debts given the general poverty levels brought about by the losses incurred through floods over the past years, and are thus not eligible for governmental assistance.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

Video footage from the Minzhu township in northern Hunan together with a script was fed through AP-TN and Reuters networks from Beijing on Saturday, 4 September. Furthermore, AP-TN and

Reuters were provided with local footage of flash floods in Chen Zhou district and RCSC footage of the aftermath. The Information delegate provided interviews to AP, AFP, Reuters, Icelandic Broadcast Corporation, Icelandic National Radio, Icelandic National Television, and *Morgunbladid Daily*. The Field delegate recently returned from the Hunan and Jiangxi provinces also gave interviews to AFP and DPA.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

Further financial contributions are needed to help the Federation and the Red Cross Society of China meet the objectives of this vital operation.

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