

# **CHINA: FLOODS**

5 November 1999

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*period covered: 12 - 26 October 1999*

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*Efforts to mitigate the long-term effects of the floods continue, while essential relief items procured and transported by the Red Cross Society of China are making an important impact on the health and nutrition of the beneficiaries. The ongoing and timely donor response as well as the support provided by the Federation have been critical in implementing the initial phase of the operation.*

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## ***The context***

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

The International Federation and the Red Cross Society of China responded by identifying target communities within these provinces, and issued an international Appeal on August 24 to provide 10.2 million Swiss francs to ensure more than 1 million people have access to clean water and sanitation materials for 2 months as well as food for approximately 250,000 people through to the end of the year. The rehabilitation phase is now underway, but victims living in the worst affected communities which have been hit by floods year after year simply cannot afford governmental loan schemes available to rebuild their livelihood.

## ***Latest events***

Due to the unusually high rainfall during this year's rainy season, water levels in the Yangtze river remain high, and farmland is still inundated even in areas where the water has receded. The flood victims have started to return to their damaged houses and destroyed fields, but a vast number of people have no means of rebuilding their homes and have nothing to return to, as they cannot afford governmental assistance. The need for food is high, as well as for water purification supplies, as river water in many cases is the sole drinking source for these people.

In some instances, local authorities have decided to shift whole communities to safer locations. Because the relocation will take some time, authorities have planned to accommodate families in tents before winter approaches, while others will be accommodated in non operating factories. The risk of outbreaks of waterborne diseases remains high, since camps are surrounded by stagnant polluted water, and sanitation conditions are bad. Mobile medical teams continue to serve the affected areas to limit the occurrence of these diseases.

### ***Hunan and Jiangxi provinces***

Approximately 14 million people were affected by this year's floods in Hunan province and 135,000 were made homeless. The most severe flooding occurred in the north in the Dongting Lake area, where some communities suffered more severe losses this year compared to the last five years. Some 90 percent of the water has already receded or been pumped out of the flood areas as dykes have been repaired and restored. People are returning to rebuild their destroyed homes, but at least 10 percent of the affected population are still living in camps along the dykes. Those who have suffered the most severe losses see no way out of the vicious cycle of poverty they are trapped in - as they have lost their crops once again they cannot give any guarantees on repaying any loans. These people have therefore been exempted from receiving the governmental loans. The local Red Cross branch has identified 45 target villages with a total population of around 50,000 people who will receive assistance from the Federation. Seventy-eight tons of rice has already been distributed. Food and water purification materials remain the most needed items.

In Jiangxi province almost 4 million people were affected by the floods, with 160,000 made homeless. The Changjiang, Le An, and Xinjiang rivers in the northern part of the province turned into lakes as dykes along the embankments burst late in July, and many areas remain flooded as dykes have not yet been repaired. The first phase of food distributions were largely conducted by boats, as many isolated areas are still cut off by flood water. Approximately 80 tons of rice have been distributed to the 51 target villages, with more than 75,000 beneficiaries identified by the local Red Cross branch.

### ***Anhui and Hubei provinces***

Around 14 million people were affected by this year's floods in Anhui, and 160,000 were evacuated. Although water is receding, water levels still remain at 15 metres - which is only 6 metres less than when the river reached its peak at 22 metres in late August. It is estimated that approximately 65 percent of the affected villages still remain under water. The majority of people living in the worst hit flood areas are staying in makeshift camps on the riverbanks, although many young people and head of households have moved temporarily in search for work to provide for their families. The local Red Cross branch together with the Chinese Red Cross headquarters have identified 75,000 flood victims who will receive assistance from the Federation. The first distribution consisting of 110 tons of rice has already been carried out.

More than 19 million people suffered the effects of the floods in Hubei where altogether 570,000 people were evacuated from their homes. The local Red Cross has identified 50,000 beneficiaries in targeted villages, where the vast majority of people are still living in camps on the dykes. People are motivated to move back to their homes, but despite efforts to clean and repair many houses are beyond restoration. Local authorities have laid out plans to provide those made homeless by the floods with heavy duty tents for winter or accommodate those who cannot return to their homes in non-functional factories. The government furthermore started a special loan scheme for food as of 15 October, as well as providing food for free for the elderly, disabled and children. As to date, the local Red Cross has already distributed 78 tons of rice to the flood victims.

In both these provinces food and water purification materials remains to be top priority, as stagnant polluted river water is the only accessible water for cleaning as well as consumption.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent action***

Local Red Cross branches in the four target provinces have identified 250,000 beneficiaries in the worst hit communities who will receive assistance from the Federation. Approximately 350 tons of rice have already been distributed in the first phase of the relief operation. Field delegates from the Federation have visited the affected areas on numerous occasions to assess the current situation and monitor the distributions.

Mobile health teams of doctors and nurses continue to provide services to remote villages - some still cut off by deep flood waters. The risk of outbreaks of epidemics such as cholera and other waterborne diseases has been controlled, and the most common ailments treated are respiratory infections, skin diseases, and diarrhoea.

Other components of the Red Cross movement, such as the Red Cross Society of China, the Hong Kong branch, and the Macao Red Cross, are expected to continue their assistance in many of the other provinces affected, and local Red Cross branches have carried out relief operations in provinces recently struck by heavy rainstorms, typhoons, and flash floods.

The procurement envisioned in the initial Plan of Action is now completed. Plan of Action 2 is intended to supply the target provinces with stocks of sanitation materials and water purification tablets. Federation field delegates were able to monitor initial distributions of both of these materials in the Provinces. Plan of Action 3 will provide over 1,500 MT of rice, as well as further distributions of water purification tablets. Other actions are in the process of being formalised with the RCSC, and the transfer of funds is expected in the next week 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 supplies since emergency assistance was only provided for the first month by the Chinese authorities. Clean water remains a major concern as most of the flood victims only source is polluted river water. Sanitation conditions in the makeshift camps necessitate the need for sanitation supplies in order to continue to fight waterborne diseases. With the approach of winter, future plans of actions will include clothing and quilts to provide flood victims some degree of protection from the elements.

## ***External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media***

Regular contacts continue with a number of media organisations. The international media, such as AP-TV, have also expressed an interest in pooling the footage.

## ***Contributions***

See Annex 1 for details.

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