

# INFORMATION BULLETIN



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies  
Fédération internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge  
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja  
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

## MONGOLIA SNOWFALLS

3 April 2002

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*This Bulletin is being issued based on the needs described below reflecting the information available at this time. Based on further updates and details from assessments, or should the situation deteriorate, the Federation will consider support through an international appeal.*

*A severe storm in mid March with snow, dust and winds gusting to 40m / second caused three more deaths and further destruction. It is proposed that left-over funding from Mongolia Snowfalls Appeal 07/ 2001 be utilised to assist beneficiaries affected by the current disaster. This 'natural disaster' situation exposes once again the effects of deeper structural issues facing Mongolia as it continues its transition from a socialist to a market economy. The Red Cross response to this complex situation is two fold: emergency relief for affected households and long term development programmes focusing on better preparedness and mitigation of risks. The Mongolian Red Cross Society (MRCS) vulnerability capacity assessment (VCA) process, launched in March 2002, aims to improve the understanding of the needs of people at greater risk of natural and human made disasters, and thus prepare more appropriate actions to assist them to cope and recover from these hazards.*

### *The Situation*

During February and March 2002, the Mongolia Red Cross Society (MRCS) and the Federation continued to monitor the situation in the western and south western provinces of Uvs, Bayan Olgii, Khovd, Gobi Altai, Bayanhongor and Uverkhangai.

Meetings were held with the State Emergency Commission (SEC), UNDP and non governmental organisations, and with MRCS branch secretaries of the provinces (aimags) affected. This has confirmed that the situation has worsened, with further snowfalls, and bitter temperatures reaching below -20°C during the night. A severe storm in mid-March with snow, dust and winds gusting to 40m / second caused further havoc, blowing a number of roofs off buildings, destroying 53 Gers and killing another 53,000 livestock. During this storm three children lost their lives, increasing the human toll to at least eight as a direct result of the winter conditions. Many of the herders in these areas are now exhausted, some deeply distressed, and there are reports of suicides.

A recent meeting organised by UNDP resulted in the announcement by the SEC representative that an emergency situation was declared for Khovd, Gobi Altai and Bayanhongor, and that over 1.2 million animals had been lost since the new year, bringing the total losses for the winter throughout the country to 2.5 million.

According to MRCS information, 5,200 families have lost all their animals and many more are in a precarious situation with insufficient animals remaining. Two difficult months still lie ahead. April has unpredictable

weather and is considered to be part of winter in Mongolia, and early Spring is cold and windy. During this time young animals are born. However, because of the severe winter and lack of feed, weakened mothers will be unable to lactate or have already naturally aborted their young. This will affect the production of dairy products, important at this time of year as part of the herders food supply. As a result, several families are going to need food relief.

The Mongolian Government has not requested international assistance, and is trying to cope with the situation with distributions of hay and fodder and food. This has been hampered by the conditions and roads blocked by snow. Many herders are unable to come to the provincial or district centres to collect this assistance.

World Vision and JCS have begun distributions of food to 6,000 families in Gobi Altai and Bayanhongor, but standard daily rations have had to be reduced to match available funding. ADRA is assessing the SW areas of Zavkhan province, which borders the northern reaches of Gobi Altai, and is considering assistance in that area.

A representative from World Food Programme (WFP), recently visited Mongolia and met with the Federation Programme Coordinator to discuss the situation and the logistics necessary for WFP assistance. It is understood that two other delegates from WFP will follow, to further assess needs and the possibility of food relief.

Mongolia is in a phase of dramatic transition from a central command to a market economy. In a recent report<sup>1</sup> FAO states that “The vulnerability of pastoral households to risks has substantially increased since decollectivization ... in the past, pastoral societies ... had a range of coping mechanisms, based on customary institutions before and on state institutions during the socialist period, to limit the damages suffered by individual households as a result of shocks, and to reinsert impoverished households into a viable production process. However, transition governments can no longer afford the wide range of previously subsidized services. In Mongolia ...with the liberalization of the economy starting in the early 1990s ... the employment guarantee has been removed, price control of many basic foodstuffs has been removed, the automatic resupply of collectively owned animals to households with insufficient herds has been discontinued, subsidized emergency fodder supplies no longer exist, cost-recovery for most services has been introduced, and social security guarantees have been reduced.”

Herders have therefore resorted to a strategy of increasing the livestock population as insurance for the future, which has resulted in over-grazing and trampling, and ultimately to a decreasing natural resource/fodder base and reduced resilience of the natural environment against the harsh climatic conditions.

Simultaneously, the country faces numerous challenges in the public provisioning of the basic social services of health, education and water. The rationalisation of the social sector has yet to result in efficient and effective services, and the decay in social infrastructure (schools, health, wells) is having extremely negative consequences. While a vast network of county hospitals and schools still exists access to these services, previously almost universal, is collapsing. These features are exacerbated in the dzud-affected areas.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent Action***

Red Cross response to this complex situation is two fold: emergency relief for affected households and long term development programmes focusing on better preparedness and mitigation of risks.

### **1. Relief**

The MRCS / Federation proposes to assist a maximum of 5,200 families in the six aimags mentioned above, with food relief and other needed commodities. It is hoped that the funds remaining from the Mongolia Snowfalls Appeal 2001, which was covered 124%, can be utilised to respond to the current situation. The Federation is in contact with donors to seek their response to this suggested course of action.

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<sup>1</sup> Pastoral Risk Management for disaster prevention and preparedness in Central Asia with special reference to the case of Mongolia, June 2001.

## **2. Preparedness and Mitigation**

In March 2002 the MRCS launched a vulnerability capacity assessment (VCA) process that aims to improve the understanding of the needs of people at greater risk of natural and human made disasters, and thus prepare more appropriate actions to assist them to cope and recover from these hazards. The VCA will contribute to a greater understanding of the nature and level of risks that vulnerable people face in Mongolia; where these risks come from; who will be worst affected; what is available at all levels to reduce risks and what initiatives can be undertaken to strengthen the impact of National Society programmes to raise the capacity of people at risk.

A series of VCA sensitisation and training workshops were implemented in March 2002. A pilot VCA will be implemented in a rural and urban setting with initial results available in July 2002.

### Information Flow

As this disaster has emerged and continued to worsen, the MRCS has increased its efforts in updating its flow of information from the affected areas. This has been done through the Red Cross network and contacts with SEC officials at district level. In March, MRCS provincial branch secretaries were requested to attend the VCA workshop at headquarters in Ulaan Baatar, which gave the opportunity to report on the dzud and how their areas were affected. This was followed by the visit of all the MRCS district branch secretaries of Gobi Altai province, which is considered to be the worst affected of all the aimags.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see [www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)

*For further details please contact :*

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*All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.*

*For support to or for further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>*

*For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.*

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