

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: DZUD

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Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) Allocated: None

This Bulletin is being issued as an update on the winter crisis in Mongolia. The Federation and the Mongolia Red Cross Society are developing an appeal for assistance which will be launched shortly. The recruitment of a logistics delegate remains a very high priority if emergency items are to be purchased and delivered on a timely and effective basis.

The Situation

Since Information Bulletin No. 1 was issued on 4 December 2002 the situation has worsened dramatically with severe snow storms raging through much of the country over the New Year. While the Mongolia Forecast Institute reports that temperatures in January, February and March are likely to be warmer than average, the snowfall is expected to be heavier. The combination of these two factors will cause the icy conditions that herders fear as it makes it more difficult for their animals to reach the pasture.

Some 50 soums (districts) of 10 aimags (provinces) are considered very severely effected with a further 7 severely effected. (There are 21 aimags in Mongolia). Due to difficult communications and restricted access, consolidated reports are difficult to compile but at least two deaths have been reported since the New Year and at least one herder is reported missing. In the same period, in two aimags alone 4,000 animals have been reported lost and are most likely dead.

Given the worsening situation the local aimag and soum governors are intensifying their efforts to provide assistance to the affected populations, and the Civil Defence Office is issuing warnings to the western aimags to prepare for worsening conditions and urging herders to take all measures possible to limit animal losses. Food shortages and animal deaths will be most noticeable from February to April 2003 when stocks for humans and livestock have been depleted. Also, severe cold and other winter conditions will last until late April.

The Dzud is a winter phenomenon and disaster involving the mass debilitation, starvation and death of livestock. It seriously damages the livelihoods of the herder households who depend upon them. The direct cause of a Dzud is the combination of damaging natural hazards, including severe widespread drought in summer, unusually cold temperatures in autumn and winter and then very heavy snowfall. The indirect causes are mainly over-concentration of stock and overgrazing of pastures in some areas, leading to environmental degradation, the disappearance of abundant grass, and inadequate winter hay preparation.

The impact of three previous dzuds and droughts have severely depleted coping mechanisms. There are increasing numbers of herders with insufficient or no livestock to sustain their livelihood. There are increasing levels of destitution due to a lack of assets and employment of ex-herders in bag (village), soum (district) and aimag (provincial) centres. There is also evidence of increasing numbers migrating to the capital, where unemployment and high registration fees (barring access to welfare services) is causing destitution.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

On 7 January the Head of the Federation's Beijing Regional Office for East Asia, the Regional Disaster Management Delegate and the Logistics Delegate from the DPRK Delegation arrived in Ulaan Baatar to assist the Mongolia Red Cross Society in appeal preparation and to make contact with embassies and media.

Appeal preparation is ongoing and a launch is anticipated (on approximately Wednesday 15 January but latest by Monday 20 January). The emergency component of the appeal operation will likely have the following two distinct phases:

- the immediate distribution of very urgently needed food;
- the distribution of other essential items such as boots and clothes - and materials to enable the very poorest children to continue school attendance.

Following one of the recommendations of the independent review team's assessment - which took place from the 10 to 20 November 2002 - the national society will also target some of the vulnerable group of herders that have been forced to migrate to the urban centres in Mongolia.

The Information Delegate from Beijing will travel to Ulaan Baatar on Sunday and will visit affected areas with the Mongolia Reuters representative to collect additional information and audiovisual materials for distribution to embassies and media in Ulaan Baatar and Beijing. This will be synchronised with the appeal launch in Geneva. The Regional Disaster Management Delegate and DPRK Logistics delegate, together with National Society representatives will also be visiting affected areas in order to collect more up to date and first hand information. A new Head of Delegation for Mongolia will arrive at the end of January, and a Field Delegate position is in the process of being filled. The recruitment of a Logistics delegate remains a very high priority if emergency items are to be purchased and delivered in a timely fashion.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see www.ifrc.org

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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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