

CHINA: EARTHQUAKE IN HEBEI PROVINCE

14 May 1998

appeal no. 3/98

situation report no. 4

period covered: March -14 May 1998

Reconstruction/rehabilitation activities were held up by adverse weather conditions, but have now picked up speed with the onset of warmer weather. At least half the projects are in the final construction phase. Purchase of food is helping to sustain the population during the spring planting. Operational progress was monitored on the spot earlier this month by a RCSC/Federation team.

The context

On 10 January 1998 an earthquake measuring 6.2 on the Richter scale struck China's north-eastern province of Hebei, completely destroying 4 villages at the epicentre and seriously affecting 700 others in Zhanjiakou Prefecture. While fatalities were not numerous (approximately 50), 8,000 people were injured, at least 1,000 of them seriously. While initial aid was provided by the military, the one hundred grass roots Red Cross units of the prefecture, with the support of the Hebei provincial Red Cross and the national headquarters of the Red Cross Society of China (RCSC), and the Federation, responded immediately to continuing food and shelter needs. With the onset of spring the emphasis has shifted to reconstruction and rehabilitation of village dwellings and essential Red Cross structures.

Latest events

Representatives from the RCSC relief department, local RCSC branch officials and the Federation Representative visited the affected area 6-8 May and observed substantial progress in returning people's lives to normal. The arrival of Spring and greatly improved weather conditions have enabled the farmers of this predominantly agricultural region to quickly do spring planting. But the region, part of the Inner Mongolian steppes, is very prone to drought, the growing season is very short, and arable land is confined to tiny outcrops.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

Work on the rehabilitation of Red Cross centres is now in the final construction phase for at least half of the projects presented in the appeal. The purchase of wheat flour for supplementary rations to help sustain beneficiaries during the delayed planting season is being done this week for immediate distribution. The RCSC has developed distribution lists and fixed distribution points.

Rehabilitation/reconstruction •

During a visit to the village of Liang Jia Zhuang the Red Cross team observed one completed Red Cross Post in full operation, with sixteen staff members; it was financed under the appeal (ECHO grant). In the vicinity of the Post was a cleared site for the construction of a Red Cross Hospital, to serve four towns in Wanquan County with a target of 20,000 beneficiaries. Construction material had been deposited at the site. This project is part of the appeal (ECHO grant).

The Hong Kong Red Cross (HKRC) branch has donated 30 million Chinese yuan, outside the appeal, for the reconstruction of village houses, schools and medical units. A delegate from the HKRC is on site, conducting assessments of site locations for beneficiary housing. Reconstruction of village housing is very much in evidence in the area, and there is a growing appearance of permanence. There is no evidence of any need for or presence of temporary shelter.

Relief items distribution/monitoring •

Contrary to popular belief, not all Chinese people are heavy consumers of rice. Inhabitants of the earthquake zone prefer and consume more bread made from wheat flour than rice. Consequently, 500 tonnes of wheat flour for 50,000 beneficiaries are being purchased this week under the appeal (ECHO grant).

In addition to the appeal, a Hong Kong Red Cross donation of 8.38 million Chinese yuan has purchased oil, rice, wheat flour and 6,600 stoves, currently being distributed by the local RCSC Zhanjiakou Prefecture branch and its units.

Monitoring is being done through the extensive RCSC network of provincial, prefecture and county branches. The Federation Representative has been invited to observe the distribution of food and the reconstruction of facilities at anytime during the operation period.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

The RCSC staff and Federation Representative met with the Vice Magistrate of the People's Government of Wanquan County of Hebei Province. Mr. Lu Yong Qing expressed the deep gratitude of the population for the support of the RCSC and the Federation. Mr. Liu Zhilin, Director of the Health Bureau for Zhjanjakou Prefecture, was also present for discussions during the team's visit.

The Federation Representative, with members of the RCSC, will escort an ECHO Representative from Brussels, May 16-17, to the earthquake zone.

Through combined action, the Information Department of the RCSC, the Information Department of the Federation Regional Delegation in Kuala Lumpur, the Federation Representative in Beijing, and the Information Department of the EU Delegation in Beijing will orchestrate specific media to cover such events as food distributions and foundation stone laying for hospitals.

A web site posting is being developed highlighting the ECHO earthquake contribution through the Federation.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

Conclusion

The remaining Red Cross hospitals and emergency centres must be completed before the onset of winter, which usually arrives very early in this region. The yield from the autumn harvest will be a telling indicator for food needs for the next winter in this drought prone region. This situation will be closely monitored.

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