

EAST ASIA

CHF 1,332,000

Programme No. 01.29/2000

Context

The East Asia region is only slowly freeing itself from the burden of recent history. There is no final peace settlement between the two Koreas after the war that ended in 1953. There are no diplomatic relations between Japan and North Korea. The unresolved Taiwan issue, and plans for “a missile defence system” covering Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, contribute to less than relaxed regional relations and the threat of a renewed arms race.

But increasingly linked economies help the process of regional integration. Investment from Japan, South Korea and Taiwan in China and Mongolia are important contributors to economic growth. Mongolia is going through political and economic transition more successfully than most of the Central Asian countries. The South Korean economy has resumed growth after two years of crisis.

However, there are still no signs of economic reform in North Korea, where large parts of the population survive on international humanitarian aid. In Mongolia, one third of the population is still below the poverty line.



And although growth indicators in China remain high, the benefits from economic reforms have not been evenly shared. Unemployment and underemployment in the rural sector produce a “floating population” of tens of millions of people. As only about 10% of the population is now covered by state-financed health care, there are signs that child mortality may again be rising. Sexually-transmitted diseases including AIDS are spreading rapidly.

Economic growth in China has occurred at the price of extreme environmental degradation. The world’s most polluted cities are found in China, the degree of deforestation being dramatically illustrated during the worst floods in a generation in the Yangtse basin in 1998. Damage to infrastructure, farmland and households as results of recurrent flooding has reached macro-economic proportions during recent years.

Vulnerability in the region is thus caused by a combination of regularly occurring natural disasters, economic deprivation and social exclusion. In addition, humanitarian problems specific to the region remain unresolved, particularly the issue of millions of families still separated by war on the Korean peninsula.

Regional Assistance Strategy

The recent Red Cross law has better defined the role and mandate of the Red Cross Society of China. Its close association with the Ministry of Health is being reduced, and its disaster response role is clearly stated. During the October 1999 Red Cross Congress, the authorities confirmed the importance of the National Society in providing relief and services to the needy as well as the importance of its role as a member of the International Red Cross Red Crescent Movement. This view was further confirmed when a legal status agreement on the establishment of a regional office was signed between the Chinese government and the Federation in October 1999, and in the pledge of the Chinese government to the International Conference in Geneva in November 1999.

Although the Red Cross Society of China increasingly emphasises its disaster response role, it continues to provide curative and preventive health services, first aid dissemination and training and HIV/AIDS prevention work. Nation-wide blood donor recruitment campaigns are carried out and a number of blood banks are managed jointly with local health authorities. During floods and other emergencies large numbers of professional health volunteers are mobilised from health facilities in the affected areas.

The RCSC branch in Hongkong plays an important role in conducting high-quality social care, blood and youth programmes and in providing support to disaster response in China. In December 1999, Macau Red Cross becomes a RCSC branch with an autonomous status similar to that of Hongkong.

The Republic of Korea National Red Cross and the Japanese Red Cross both concentrate their activities on health and social services, with particular emphasis on high-quality blood services. The South Korean Society has conducted large-scale resource mobilisation for the victims of the crisis in North Korea since 1995. The Japanese Red Cross is one of the most important donors to Federation development and emergency programmes, and regularly provides human resources as well as delegate training opportunities, inviting Societies in the region. The Republic of Korea National Red Cross is gradually emerging as a donor and contributor of human resources.

Roles and activities of the Societies in Mongolia and North Korea are described in the respective country strategies.

With the establishment of its regional office in Beijing in late 1999, the Federation will be able to provide more long-term and consistent support to the Red Cross Society of China. The experiences from flood and earthquake emergency operations in recent years have been reviewed, including a thorough external evaluation of the 1998 flood operation. This review, as well as an internal review conducted in Hongkong, will serve as the basis for the establishment of a disaster preparedness programme plan in 2000.

In addition to its direct programme support to the RCSC, the regional office will provide services and assistance to the Participating National Societies conducting programmes through bilateral co-operation in China.

With the closing of the Federation representative position in Mongolia, the regional office will also manage support to the Mongolian Red Cross in accordance with existing development plans through regular visits and co-ordination of Federation human resources available in the region, making use of an office in Ulan Bataar manned by local staff. The Beijing regional office will also provide logistical support to the DPRKorea delegation.

The regional office means that a permanent point of contact with foreign missions and international organisations in Beijing will be established.

Programme Objectives

Disaster Response

The Federation will provide support as and when necessary.

Disaster Preparedness

With the enormous impact and geographical scope of floods in China, and the necessity to thoroughly involve provincial branches in problem identification, programme planning and design, it is anticipated that a long-term Disaster Preparedness programme will not be presented until the end of 2000. The programme will include a better defined role for existing disaster preparedness centres, provisions for the mobilisation of resources and the establishment of decentralised relief stocks, training in disaster management at different levels, and setting up of a communications network.

Capacity Building

A three year finance development programme, designed in 1999 on the basis of experiences gained during the 1998 and 1999 flood operations, will receive support in 2000. Its aim is to assist the National Society to upgrade its financial management and ultimately produce consolidated financial reports through a large-scale training and support effort starting at the lowest levels in the National Society structure.