

CHINA: EARTHQUAKES

17 January, 2000

Information Bulletin N° 1

The Disaster

At 22.09 and 23.37 on Friday 14 January 2000, two earthquakes measuring 6.0 and 6.5 in magnitude respectively hit the county of Yao'an in the Province of Yunnan located at 25.58 N and 101.15 E. Yunnan is situated in the South Western part of China, and borders Tibet, Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam. According to experts from the State Seismological Bureau, further aftershocks are believed to be expected in the coming days.

Initial reports from the Yunnan Branch of the Red Cross Society of China (RCSC) indicate that the worst effected areas were in the neighbouring counties of Yao'an and Dayao (just to the north of Yao'an). These counties are located some 160 km W.N.W of the provincial capital of Kunming. In total, 7 counties in 2 prefectures that contain 74 townships are reported to have been affected.

First accounts from the area indicated that a large number of homes had been destroyed and damaged, with the injuries resulting from the earthquakes given at 400, with four fatalities. 29 of the injured are reported to be in a serious condition. The relatively low casualty figure has been attributed to the mountainous area being sparsely populated, on top of the fact that many residents evacuated their homes after the first quake occurred, thereby saving themselves further injury when the main quake struck an hour and a half later.

Latest reports (17 January) from the official Chinese News Agency, gives the total number of buildings damaged as 65,000 in Yao'an, with a further 55,000 damaged in Dayao county.

The Yunnan Branch of Red Cross Society of China (RCSC) report in their Initial Disaster Report that there are an estimated 120,000 homeless. Most of these are living in the open in makeshift shelters.

Night time temperatures in this mountainous area are currently around minus 5/6° Celsius and around 18/19° during daytime. This significant fluctuation in temperatures is expected to result in a high incidence of colds amongst the victims.

The region involved is traditionally a poor area which has historically received support from the central government. Yunnan Province has a high population (30% of the total living in China) of ethnic minorities. Being located in a mountainous area, the agricultural outputs are low, which means the population have had to rely on assistance from outside.

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Whilst the RCSC are not at this time seeking an International Appeal to provide external assistance, the International Federation would encourage spontaneous donations to cover this amount.

The Federation delegation in China will continue to monitor closely the situation.

Peter Rees-Gildea
Director
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