

CHINA: EARTHQUAKE

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The Disaster

On Thursday 19 November, two earthquakes measuring respectively 5.6 and 6.2 in magnitude on the Richter scale hit a rural area on the borders of Yunnan and Sichuan Provinces in south west China. Following the main earthquakes, some 200 aftershocks occurred, causing additional damage to already weakened structures. The earthquakes were the latest in a long line of disasters to strike China this year.

Recent reports from the area, considered one of the poorest in China, indicate that the worst affected parts are around Lanniqi and Xin Yin Pan townships, about 30 km east of Ninglang. A total of 16 townships in five Yunnan counties around Ninglang Li Autonomous County (including Lijiang) and nearby Yanyuan in neighbouring Sichuan were also affected, although most recent reports state that the damage in the Sichuan area is relatively slight.

A total of 312,000 people are officially reported to have been affected by the disaster. The Yunnan Red Cross assessment mission that visited some villages on 21 November, two days after the quake, reported that 22,000 homes were affected and estimated the number of homeless as 23,650, most of whom are living in the open in makeshift shelters. Temperatures in this mountainous area (2,400 metres) are still hovering below 0 degrees Celsius at night, and snowfalls have been reported.

According to the Red Cross, the number of injuries has now risen to 4,167, with three fatalities. The most seriously injured are being treated in the local county hospital. Less seriously injured are being treated at home by Red Cross and Public Health Bureau mobile medical teams.

The quakes also damaged 257 schools, causing cracks in some 4,335 classrooms. The local earthquake monitoring station fears an even larger earthquake might hit this earthquake prone area in the next few months.

Government action

The local authorities have released 1,000 blankets, 1,200 quilts, 460 woollen mats, 1,000 tents and large quantities of plastic sheeting to help with temporary shelter. Food and medical supplies have been sent to the area by the Ninglang Civil Affairs Bureau. Supplies of medicines were adequate to meet needs. The provincial government has earmarked 20 million yuan (CHF 3 million) for emergency aid and relief works and another 10 million yuan (CHF 1.6 million) has been allocated by the Ministry of Civil Affairs. To further augment these government pledges, the provincial government issued an urgent national and international appeal for donations of clothes, food and medicines. As a result, other Chinese NGOs, international agencies (MSF-Holland, Oxfam, Save the Children) and charitable organisations are also involved in raising funds and distribution relief for this emergency.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Yunnan Province Red Cross is mobilising funds and in kind donations to assist the most vulnerable in the disaster area.

While the Red Cross Society of China (RCSC) has agreed to release 200,000 yuan (CHF 32,000) immediately to the region, it has requested some additional assistance from the Federation to supplement these funds. The Federation has released CHF 50,000 from its Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF) to start the procurement of the required relief items.

Earlier, on behalf of the RCSC, the Federation urgently sought funds to cover the CHF 340,000 needed for this emergency operation. So far contributions have been received from the Canadian Red Cross (CAD 100,000) and the American Red Cross (CHF 83,000). Based on this positive support from donors, the Federation has asked the Yunnan Provincial Red Cross to initiate the procurement of part of the requested materials.

To provide adequate monitoring of the earthquake relief programme, a reporting delegate who was to cover ECHO funded programmes for flood relief, was re-posted. On his arrival in early December, he was sent to Yunnan Province to assist the Provincial Red Cross in its disaster relief operations.

Needs

The main priority needs are for quilts and warm clothing to combat the freezing temperatures. Additional needs are for tents and food. While some stocks were available in the Red Cross Disaster Centre in Kunming, these were seriously depleted during the summer floods operation.

As a result of its needs assessment, the Yunnan Branch of the RCSC requested assistance from the RCSC/Federation to purchase 5,000 quilts, 5,000 heavy winter jackets and 500 tents.

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