

CHINA: FLOODS

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The Disaster

Since 15 June, earlier than expected, heavy seasonal rainfall has affected more than 10 Provinces and municipalities, especially those lying along the Yangtze river and its tributaries. In many areas along the Xinjiang River in Jiangxi Province, and the Yuanshui River and Lishui River in Hunan Province, waters are reaching the danger levels set for flood warning. Water levels in a number of lakes in Anhui, Jiangsu and Zhejiang have also reached danger levels. At the Taihu Lake in the eastern Province of Jiangsu, close to China's main industrial city of Shanghai, between 500 and 800 mm of rain fell during the five days of 28 June to 2 July, causing extensive waterlogging. This is more than half the yearly average rainfall normally recorded in this province.

According to the latest Chinese Red Cross and Government data, the most severely affected provinces are Anhui, Zhejiang, Hubei, Hunan, Jiangsu, Sichuan, Chongqing and Jiangxi. The year's first flood peak passed through Hubei at the end of last week, with the second expected early this week.

From the statistics reported to the Chinese Government, which are supported to a great extent by reports received by the Relief Department of the RCSC from its Provincial Branches, the torrential rainfall has affected some 59.4 million people and killed 240 people. A further 3,055 are reported to have been injured.

In addition, 1.84 million people have had to be evacuated to safer areas. An estimated 482,000 rooms have collapsed and 1.67 million have been severely damaged. In terms of agricultural losses, the flooding has affected some 3.5 million hectares of cultivated land. Of this, a total 660,000 hectares of crops have been completely lost.

The Provinces of Anhui, Zhejiang, Hubei, Chongqing and Jiangxi have to date the highest number of homeless. In Anhui, nine county centres were flooded, and 3,155 villages surrounded by flood waters. In Zhejiang, ten cities and 45 counties have been affected by the floods, with 770,000 people forced to flee their homes. Torrential and prolonged rainfall in Hubei Province has forced some 334,000 to be evacuated and caused 40 deaths. Further downstream in Jiangxi Province, the heavy rains and localised flooding have so far affected 4.37 million people, with 267,000 forced to evacuate their homes.

The Relief Department in the HQ of the Red Cross Society of China (RCSC) have received numerous appeals from Provincial Branches for assistance. Funds allocated for the purchase of Disaster Preparedness stocks will be used to purchase water purification tablets, sanitation materials and basic curative medicines for the worst affected areas. Once a complete assessment has been carried out, further reserves of Disaster Preparedness funds will be released.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

As in previous disasters of this kind in China, the Red Cross mobilised its resources immediately on receiving flood reports. The following action has taken place:

The RCSC HQ in Beijing has requested Provinces to provide up to date disaster reports on the situation in their own areas, so that an initial plan of action can be formulated.

Red Cross medical teams have been mobilised and sent to the affected areas to provide medical assistance and supply water purification tablets and sanitation materials to ensure safe water supplies and prevent the outbreak of waterborne diseases.

Provincial Branches have been encouraged to organise their own fund-raising campaigns and release Disaster Preparedness stocks to the worst affected areas.

The Hubei Provincial Red Cross, in co-operation with the local health department, organised and dispatched 258 medical teams to the affected areas in the province and, at the same time, prepared to distribute 2,082 cartons of sanitation materials, water purification tablets and curative medicines with a value of RMB 7 million (CHF 1.271 Million), along with a small quantity of clothing.

The Zhejiang Provincial Red Cross and the local health department mobilised 550 medical teams. The provincial branch has distributed RMB 1.2 million (CHF 218,000) worth of relief items, including drinking water and sanitation materials (RMB 280,000), food (RMB 80,000), tents and pumping facilities (RMB 660,000) and daily necessities and clothing (RMB 80,000).

In Anhui Province, the local Red Cross branches at different levels and the health authorities sent 714 medical teams to the affected areas to provide medical care and carry out disease prevention activities. The Red Cross has distributed medicines, food, clothing and quilts with a total value of RMB 2.68 million (486,741 CHF).

The Provincial Red Cross in Jiangxi has allocated RMB 200,000 (36,300 CHF) worth of relief materials to the flood affected areas in the province. Many medical teams have been organised by the Red Cross at various levels.

In many provinces, health education teams have printed 'epidemic prevention' leaflets, which will be circulated amongst the affected population.

The HQ has organised a national 'hot line' to allow donations from the public to be pledged over the phone. A new bank account has been opened to receive donations.

Orders for sanitation material and water purification tablets, funded through the Federation, have been placed and items will be sent direct to the disaster areas.

Further tendering is underway for water purification tablets, sanitation materials, clothing and tents. These purchases will be funded through a cash reserve of 810,000 CHF built from funds already in country for disaster relief. These funds were previously committed by the Federation and donor national societies in preparation for the 1999 floods. Suppliers will be given detailed distribution plans once a full assessment has been completed, so essential supplies can be immediately sent to those areas worst affected.

Between 6 and 12 June the Head of RCSC Relief Services visited two of the worst affected provinces (Jiangsu and Zhejiang) to carry out an initial assessment of the flood situation and the Red Cross activities.

Government Response

The Chinese Government has taken action not only to evacuate the victims, but also to cover their most pressing basic needs. Tents have been released from government storage facilities in Anhui and Hubei provinces to provide shelter for the most vulnerable groups. Warehouses and factories have been turned into communal shelters for the displaced population.

Needs

Thanks to the national society's efforts during the 1998 floods, some DP stocks (such as clothing, sanitation materials and water purification tablets) are currently in place in a number of the affected Provinces. These stocks will act as a buffer to cover initial needs. Further supplies, purchased with existing Federation funds, will be sent out once a clear plan of action has been developed by the RCSC and the Federation delegation.

The initial assessment, along with the reports from the Provincial Red Cross branches, clearly indicates that the main emphasis in this early phase of the disaster will be on the procurement and distribution of water purification tablets and sanitation materials, curative medicines, food, clothing and quilts.

Although the RCSC is not at present looking for external international assistance, discussions are taking place between the Federation's delegation and the leadership to determine how best to assist the National Society. The Federation would welcome spontaneous cash donations to support the Society's ongoing relief activities.

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