



IFRC | Flood survivors in DPRK face creeping threats as winter closes in

30 September 2016

One month has passed since devastating floods swept through the northeast region of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). Today, hundreds of thousands across Hamgyong Province remain in need of humanitarian assistance and concerns are mounting for their welfare as winter sets in.

Approximately 600,000 people are thought to have been directly affected by the floods across six counties in North Hamgyong Province. The floods damaged and destroyed 30,000 homes, rendering 70,000 people homeless.

"Urgent action is needed before the first snows fall. Last year that was in third week of October. People lack proper shelter, clothing and other basic items to stay warm and healthy through the winter", said Chris Staines, Head of Delegation with the IFRC in DPRK.

The IFRC together with the DPRK Red Cross Society has been at the forefront of relief efforts, reaching close to 30,000 people with emergency items such as tarpaulins for shelter, bedding, kitchen sets and toiletries, but more help is needed. On 21 September, the IFRC launched a 15.2 million Swiss Franc emergency appeal (USD 15.5 million, Euros 13.9 million) to reach more than 330,000 people with aid. So far the appeal is only 11% covered.

IFRC delegate Patrick Elliott recently returned from Musan County and Hoeryong City where he was assessing the impact of the floods.

"Everywhere you go people are clearing up the debris left behind, salvaging bricks and timber and building temporary shelters. Access to many affected areas remains a challenge, thousands of people are working to clear and repair the roads by hand", said Elliott.

"In some villages the damage is extreme. We travelled for almost two hours down the Tumen River from Hoeryong City and found a village where 300 houses had been swept away when the river burst its banks. Only 100 homes remained."

A major concern for the Red Cross is the approaching winter. Shelter remains the paramount need. Many survivors have been surviving amidst the rubble in makeshift shelters, others have been staying in public buildings or with host families. The government is taking the lead on constructing permanent homes and on its part, the IFRC is contributing to this effort by purchasing thousands of roofing sheets which will be shipped into DPRK.

"The situation at the moment isn't easy, but in two to three weeks it will be a different story," said Elliott. "It's already chilly at night and temperatures will soon plummet to below zero. People have lost their coal supplies and are burning bits of wood in makeshift stoves to keep warm. The risk of a secondary disaster is very real, they need a proper roof over their heads, fuel and warm clothes."

At one village in Musan County, increasing numbers of elderly and young people were being seen by medical staff at a First Aid post established by the DPRK Red Cross.

"Communicable diseases like diarrhoea and respiratory infections are on the rise. Under these conditions it's what we'd expect to see, but it's a growing concern", said Elliott.