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*Medical workers wading through flooded streets in Jiangsu province. Over 87,000 medical personnel were sent to the stricken areas, where 20% of the population were reported to be suffering from dysentery and malaria.*

suffered their worst water shortage since 1949.

The floods, which peaked in June and again in July, affected various areas in different ways. In some places the water level rose slowly, giving the population time to prepare for evacuation and to salvage belongings, including food supplies. In many more areas the floods had an immediate impact due to the collapse of dams or flood-gates, or the deliberate blasting of dams to protect vital infrastructure or valuable industrial areas. The priority, in such places, was the saving of lives, not possessions, and often called

for the rapid evacuation of tens of thousands of people in a matter of hours.

In Anhui and Jiangsu provinces the floods were the worst in nearly a century. Torrential rains in Anhui generated flooding of the country's longest river, the Yangtze, swamping over forty thousand villages, some of which were deluged by four metres of water. In other villages, completely isolated and accessible only by boat, people struggled to survive in flimsy huts set up on top of dykes, themselves precarious after the rains. Over three-quarters of the 56.7 million inhabitants were affected, with 14 million being severely hit, and 556 people lost their lives. Eighty per cent of the wheat crop in this important grain-producing province was lost, and 35% of its sparse cotton crop was threatened.

In the neighbouring coastal province of Jiangsu, local people, including workers released from factories, struggled to fill sandbags to protect the city of Nanjing, one of China's historic capitals. The low-lying areas around the district of Wuxi are some of the most fertile in the country. When Lake Taihu inundated the city and surrounding farmlands, people transported themselves in any accessible buoyant material, including wooden tubs, while others crowded onto roof tops with salvaged furniture and livestock to await rescue or the arrival of relief supplies. Forty-two million of the 64.3 million population were affected throughout the province, 7.4 million very severely, and nearly 18,000 villages were swamped by flood

waters, causing 245 people to lose their lives.

### National relief efforts

The Chinese Government places great importance on the combatting of natural disasters, and under its direction local authorities collaborate with each other in providing relief when disaster strikes. An impressive amount of assistance was thus mobilized after the floods, through the coordinating agency, the Department of Disaster Relief of the Ministry of Civil Affairs. All available local resources at central and local levels were organized to combat the floods and deliver relief assistance as over 21 million local people, army contingents and the Chinese Red Cross worked together to fight the disaster.

Relief efforts focussed on the provision of food and shelter, the improvement of sanitary and living conditions of the victims, the draining of flood waters and, where circumstances permitted, the planting of grains. Prevention of epidemics was high on the list of priorities since up to 25% of the population in the stricken areas were reported to be suffering from dysentery and malaria. Over 700 medical and anti-epidemic teams, involving around 87,000 medical personnel, were sent to the flooded provinces. The Chinese State Council distributed 250 million kilos of grain in the disaster area, in addition to providing 400 million yuan (US \$7.5 million) in disaster relief funds.

### International relief efforts

In view of the unprecedented magnitude inflicted by the floods,

on 11 July the Chinese Government launched its first formal appeal for international assistance for disaster victims. Following the appeal, a United Nations fact-finding mission visited Anhui and Jiangsu provinces. The mission comprised a senior delegate from UNDR0 and a member of the UNDP staff in Beijing. By the end of the month an action plan for delivery of relief assistance through the UN system had been drawn up on the basis of the findings of the mission, and following consultations with the Ministry of Civil Affairs. Full cooperation and logistical support had been extended to the UN mission by the Ministry, and by provincial and local authorities.

In response to the appeal, aid, amounting to US \$7.3 million, was pledged by 14 donors (10 governments and 4 UN agencies). Their cash donations were channelled through UNDR0/UNDP and pooled in a cost-sharing project for the

local purchase of relief items, including construction materials for shelters for the three million homeless, medicines and water-purification facilities.

The sum of US \$4 million was allocated to Anhui, US \$2 million to Jiangsu, and US \$1.3 million to neighbouring Henan province. Approximately 80% of this assistance in the three provinces was allocated to purchasing building materials, including temporary shelters as well as more durable constructions for those unable to rebuild before the winter arrives. In many areas county authorities opted for semi-permanent constructions - planned to be erected by late August - built entirely with bricks and tiles, with the possibility of using the same materials for permanent buildings later on. Progress in the building of these shelters was accelerated by the voluntary participation of large numbers of local people. Ten percent of the assistance was earmarked for medicines and water purifica-

tion facilities, the supply of which was monitored by the World Health Organization. A contingency fund was set up with the remaining 10% of the donated aid to cover any other emergency arising from the floods. Since no such major emergency arose, the fund was used to provide shelters (due to be completed by mid-September) for a further 25,000 persons in the most affected counties.

At a donor's meeting held in Beijing on 31 July, aimed at sharing the results of the fact-finding mission, the UNDR0 delegate said he was deeply moved by the plight of the people affected by the floods in the five counties he had visited. The priorities established for the delivery of UN-administered assistance were aimed at responding to those needs not met by other donors, such as the International Red Cross. The UNDR0 relief officer then left Beijing on a relief-delivery operation, monitored by UNDR0/UNDP and planned to be completed within two weeks.

Once the emergency stage has subsided, and needs in the stricken areas become clearer, the UNDR0/UNDP resident representative in Beijing will meet the donors once again to discuss rehabilitation needs.

Regular meetings were organized by the resident representative for coordination and information exchange with donors, the UN system and NGO representatives, and will continue until the emergency phase is over. The rehabilitation phase, following such cataclysmic flooding, is not expected to begin before September and October.



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*Government workers in Chiangzhou city, Jiangsu province, distributing food supplies to victims of the floods.*