

Red Cross Society promises reforms

By SHAN JUAN
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In a bid to regain diminished public trust, the Red Cross Society of China has promised a series of reforms, including an online donation tracking system that is expected to be in place by year-end.

Zhao Baige, the society's executive vice-president, outlined the plans at a news conference in Beijing on Thursday.

The news conference follows the State Council's Tuesday release of guidelines on developing the country's Red Cross missions.

"The document, for the first time, clearly defines the nature, position, role, and responsibilities of the Red Cross in China today, which should be an open and transparent humanitarian organization, not just a fundraising charity group," she said.

The guideline recognized the Red Cross as an indispensable auxiliary to the government in the humanitarian field, and as such, one that requires a favorable environment of law, policy, and public opinion.

"That's recognition and support from the government for the Red Cross, which previously suffered a credibility crisis," said Deng Guosheng, a professor specializing in philanthropic studies at the School of Public Policy and Management with the Tsinghua University in Beijing.

The Red Cross faced such questions of its credibility last year after

Guo Meimei, who claimed to be a manager of a Red Cross-related organization, flaunted a lavish lifestyle over the Internet. That sparked mass speculation about possible corruption in the society.

Zhao called that incident a "growing pain" of the Red Cross, adding that the controversy has "somewhat prompted a top-down reform in the organization to address existing problems and gradually meet public expectations."

Creating transparency tops the reform agenda.

The Red Cross Society at various levels must provide information related to fundraising, financial management, tenders, procurement and distribution of donations. Donors and the public have the right to know the details, the guidelines said.

To facilitate that, an efficient, transparent and normative system of management, information and supervision, including a donation-tracking system, will be established within three to five years, Zhao said.

Furthermore, the system will be expanded to 80 percent of the provincial branches of the RCSC by the end of 2013 and later to more than 50 percent of the Red Cross organizations at the county level by the end of 2014, she added.

"It will help the RCSC improve its transparency with the functions of fundraising management, publicizing the use of funds, and risk

warning in material management," she said.

The guidelines also outline a fund-management plan for the society.

The costs for carrying out humanitarian tasks supported by donations can be disbursed but must be publicly publicized, the guidelines said.

"That's in line with international practice, and we need an operation mechanism that correspond with both the socialist market-economy system and international humanitarian values to sustain our work," Zhao said.

A spokesman system will be introduced to better communicate with the public and help secure transparency, she added.

Deng, the Tsinghua University professor, praised the reforms but expressed concerns about their implementation.

"Regarding reform measures, particularly those on strengthening the society's management and supervision over its local branches, I don't think they have the incentive to do so, given that they are now funded by local governments," he said.

Zhao agreed, saying, "The way it has operated and practiced for so long might be a barrier to the reform."

Wang Rupeng, the society's secretary-general, said that in some areas, there is too much government interference into the local Red Cross's organizing mechanism, internal governance, and routine operation.



ZHANG YU / CHINA NEWS SERVICE
Zhao Baige, the executive vice-president of the Red Cross Society of China, at a news conference in Beijing on Thursday.

At more than 40 percent of the Chinese counties across the mainland, the Red Cross remains under local health departments, he said.

"The Red Cross should be allowed more independence to better carry out its tasks in the country," Deng said.

He expected that such a document issued by the State Council would help propel the new reforms, particularly at the local level.

Official admits fees to move corpses are 'unreasonable'

By SHAN JUAN

Zhao Baige, the executive vice-president of the Red Cross Society of China, pointed out at a news conference on Thursday that it was unreasonable and unacceptable for the Red Cross branch in Beijing to charge the families of flood victims to move corpses.

"Although the charge for transportation and treatment costs was approved by the Beijing municipal price-making authority and health bureau, that was still unreasonable given it was during a huge disaster, and we must find out a better way to improve the quality and level of our rescue services," said Zhao.

Chinese Internet users revealed that emergency buses from an RCSC-affiliated rescue center charged 620 yuan (\$100) to help transfer the bodies of people who died during a severe rainstorm in Beijing on July 21, the heaviest rainstorm in six decades that left at least 77 residents dead in the capital.

The incident briefly stirred up heated public discussions on the

Sina micro blog, with most of the netizens saying that the RCSC's behavior was hurting people's feelings.

"I highly doubt that the transportation cost is reasonable. The RCSC should be a life-saving model, not to extract harsh terms under emergency conditions," said an online writer using the name "Chengzhongcun 007".

Another writer who claimed to be lawyer said the charge was against humanity and the values of the Red Cross.

"This incident demonstrated existing problems in the RCSC's capacity building, and in essence it resembled the cases of toll stations on the highway continuing to levy charges and traffic police still giving tickets during the heavy rain," Zhao said.

Rescue centers should focus on boosting rescue capabilities and service levels rather than charging citizens during emergency situations, said Zhao, adding that the money has been refunded to the families.

Ji Jin contributed to this story



JIA CE / FOR CHINA DAILY
Border guards in Taizhou, Zhejiang province, help a tourist who got into difficulty near the city's beach as winds whipped up waves. Typhoon Saola was on target to hit the province on Friday.

Typhoons: Scenic spots waiting for official instructions

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As of 2 pm on Thursday 6,992 boats had been ordered to return to port, according to Shen Zhiwang, a member of staff from the provincial flood prevention department, adding that more than 50,000 people have been relocated in response to the typhoon's approach.

"All the relocated people have been settled in homes of relatives or friends, or in school dormitories," Shen said. Inspection teams have been sent to Lianyungang, Yancheng and Nantong, three of Jiangsu's coastal cities.

According to Yancheng's flood control headquarters, all boats have been told to stay in port.

Lianyungang's flood prevention department said that the water level of the city's key reservoirs and rivers has been lowered to accommodate rain.

Chen Xiaoxi, a Lianyungang resident, said that strong winds and rains hit the city on Thursday afternoon.

The Yangtze River in Nanjing's Xiaogan district may breach danger levels,

according to the city's flood prevention department.

Nanjing's urban management bureau is publishing a booklet telling people what precautions to take.

Soldiers have already been dispatched to areas likely to be hit, the water conservancy department said.

Gulangyu, a scenic spot in Xiamen and one of the most popular tourist destinations in China, remained open on Thursday afternoon.

"But we are waiting for official instructions and ready to close," said an official with Gulangyu Management Committee.

The Fujian provincial department of ocean and fisheries said on Thursday that 59,337 fishermen and marine staff have been relocated.

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Sun Li in Fuzhou and Cang Wei in Nanjing contributed to this story.

GLANCE

BE READY FOR TYPHOONS

- 1) Typhoons can cause blackouts and cut off water supplies, so store necessities beforehand.
- 2) Strong winds can blow objects from high altitudes, which can easily cause injuries. To ensure safety, check potential threats such as flowerpots, air conditioners' outdoor facilities, canopies and items on construction sites.

PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST TYPHOONS

- 1) Watch for weather forecasts on TV or on radio and follow the government's instructions to get ready for evacuation.
- 2) Upon arrival of the storm, do not stay in cars, old housing, work sheds or temporary structures, and stay away from scaffolds, telephone poles, trees, billboards and iron towers.
- 3) Avoid outside activities, do not use elevators and cut off the power supply of all electrical appliances in case of a lightning strike. Furthermore, stay away from windows and doors.

DISEASE PREVENTION AFTER A TYPHOON

- 1) Be careful while cleaning damaged houses, especially when dealing with debris or walking on it. Wear sturdy shoes or boots, long sleeves, masks and gloves.
- 2) If scratched by exposed nails, metal or glass, go to see the doctor as soon as possible in order to treat the wound correctly and receive a tetanus shot if necessary.
- 3) Do not eat anything buried or soaked in the flood.
- 4) Refrain from using coal and fuel generators in a closed space in order to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning due to lack of air circulation.

CHINA DAILY

Security network looks at closing inequalities

By WANG HUAZHONG
and CHEN XIN

132

cases of malpractice
were found by the National Audit Office after inspecting the operation of 18 security funds nationwide from 2005 to 2011

China's social security network — which covers the largest number of people in the world — is focusing on shortening the gaps between urban and rural, developed and less-developed regions, said a nationwide audit.

The National Audit Office's report, released on Thursday, concluded China has "basically" established a social security management system from 2005 to 2011.

The report inspected the operation of 18 security funds in 2,790 counties, 404 cities and 37 province-level regions over that period.

It also detected flaws in the management system and found 132 cases of malpractice concerning 300 suspects.

"Looking into the allocation of social security resources, the focus is on less-developed and rural regions," said the report.

"It makes efforts to shorten regional security gaps."

Since 2005, the central government has injected nearly 80 percent of its social security investment into central and western parts of China — where 53.8 percent of the Chinese population lives.

The investment in those regions rose 54.7 billion yuan (\$8.6 billion) in 2005 to nearly 361 billion yuan in 2011, exceeding the growth rate of the national GDP.

At the same time, the investment in social security funds for farmers has grown substantially as well, the report said.

Financial subsidies for the new rural pension system increased from just over 1 billion yuan in 2009 to 35.2 billion yuan in 2011.

Meanwhile, subsidies for the new rural cooperative medical system surged from 542 million yuan in 2005 to 80.1 billion yuan in 2011.

Monthly allowances for low-income families in rural areas also grew 87 percent over the period.

Lu Quan, an expert with the social security research center at Renmin University of China, said taxation, which subsidizes the security funds, varies in places and therefore leads to security gaps regionally.

"For Central and West China, their abilities to make up losses of the funds are quite limited," said Lu.

"Injections from the central government together with increasing input in rural residents' pension and medical expenses have shown the government's determination to improve the livelihood of residents there."

Officials from the top audit authority said the audit aims to assess

whether China's economic boom has been shared by its people and if the security system serves the people well.

Citing the report, Chen Taihui, head of the office's social security audit division, said China's social security system made a "historical breakthrough and has built itself a network that covers the largest number of people in the world."

"The audit result shows the funding scales of our social security have expanded constantly. The funds are generally safe and sound and operate steadily and with standards."

"The system effectively plays the roles well as a booster, buffer, stabilizer and safety network."

According to the report, the 18 social security funds had 2.84 trillion yuan of income and spent 2.11 trillion yuan in 2011.

Despite the strong financial standing and extensive coverage, the network has flaws too, as the report revealed.

The audit found local governments appropriated or illegally operated 1.73 billion yuan of the funds for other ends such as building stadiums, office buildings and buying cars.

A total of 1.85 billion yuan had been handed out to ineligible recipients or compensation claims.

Less standardized management of the funds in 392 counties, 96 cities and 13 province-level regions resulted in 42.7 billion yuan not being managed directly under designated fiscal accounts.

Officials of the National Audit Office added that in the wake of some high-profile court sentences on fund grafts, the funds have become a "high-tension line" that few dare to cross.

A court meted out a death sentence in July to Liu Baolu, former director of a social security fund in Gansu province, for embezzling 28 million yuan over 10 years.

Another official, Zhang Xun'an in Huainan, Anhui province, was put behind bars for 10 years for keeping pensions and subsidies that were paid to more than 50 pensioners who had died.

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