

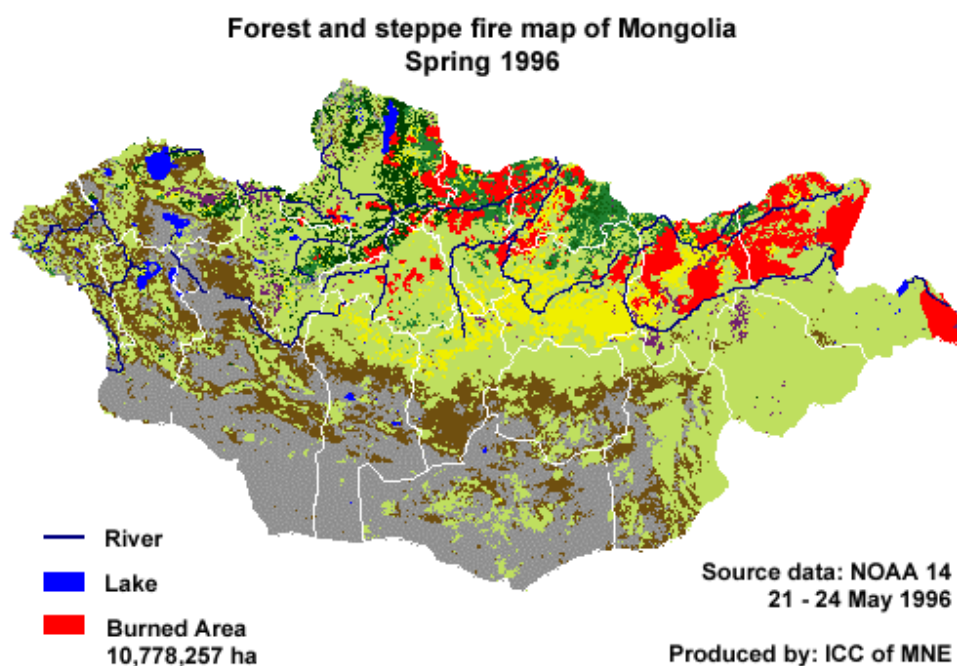
Rotary Volunteer Plastic Surgeons healing severe burn-wound victims

Mongolia Spring Fire 1996

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Disaster Description

DHA/UNDP Resident Coordinator in Ulaanbaatar reports that fast and fierce spring fires have affected a large part of the country. Over 30 steppe areas have been hit in the provinces of Dornod, Khentii (eastern part), Bulgan, Selenge (north-central part) and Tuv (central part). In Dornod, one person is reported dead and one in critical condition. Two thirds of Dashbalbar county in Dornod was burned-out. Thousands of cattle have been killed. As of 17 April, in Dornod and Tuv provinces, fires have been extinguished. In Khentii, Selenge and Bulgan provinces, fires are still burning in many areas of steppe and forest. (UN DHA, 18 April 1996)

The government of Mongolia has issued an appeal for international assistance for fighting the huge spring fire and providing relief to the victims. Forest and steppe fires which started late February and rapidly spread into a large area of northern half of Mongolia have now burnt 3 million ha of forest and 5 million ha of pastureland. 5 persons are dead, 16 seriously injured. More than 300 persons have been left homeless. More than 4,000 persons have been mobilized to fight fires. (UN DHA, 26 April 1996)

As of 25 April, more than 130 fires had broken out in 12 provinces, which are home to some 371,400 people or 16.6 per cent of the total population and 5.7 million heads of livestock which are 19.9 per cent of the country total. According to reports from the Mongolian standing emergency commission, so far the fires damaged 30,000 SqKm of forest area (17.1 per cent of national total) and 50,000 SqKm of pasture land (4.2 per cent of total). Latest reports indicate that as of 29 April, 72 fires are still burning in 13 provinces. 13 persons were killed, 34 injured and over 700 people left homeless. 5,000 heads of livestock perished. (UN DHA, 29 April 1996)

On 3 May 1996 the State Emergency Commission reported that 46 fires were still burning and 71 spots had been brought under control in 13 aimags. According to the latest information the situation is particularly difficult in Huvsgul, Bulgan, Arkhangai, Khentii, Tuv, Dornod and Uvs aimags. Though some precipitation was recorded in some areas in the last two days, the weather conditions are likely to remain unfavourable during the next 10 days. (UN DHA, 3 May 1996)

There has been no sign of improvement of the situation. Due to the unusually dry weather, fires still continue to break out. The latest report indicates that, as of 27 May, the total number of fires had now reached 340 (53 increase since 9 May) with 38 spots still burning out of control in Tuv, Bulgan, Selenge, Huvsgul, Arkhangai, Zavkhan and Uvurkhangai aimags. An additional 100 fires were still burning but under some control. 202 fires had been extinguished. About 8,500 local residents, 150 parachutists, 900 military service-men and police-men as well as over 200 vehicles/machineries were involved in fire-fighting. Helicopters and airplanes have been used to battle the fires. The situation is more difficult in Huvsgul, Selenge and Zavkhan aimags which are rich in forest resources. Additional military and police forces had been transferred to those areas. The field headquarters of the Civil Defence Board has been established in Huvsgul aimag. (UN DHA, 29 May 1996)

The government reported that the emergency situation is now over. As of 17 June, 383 wildfires in the territories of 14 provinces of Mongolia had been completely extinguished. Nevertheless, the government informed all parties to remain on alert as there is still a danger of renewed outbreaks of fire and several days of rainfall will be required to minimize the danger of new outbreaks. (UN DHA, 19 June 1996)

DHA/UNDP =

Department of Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations Development Programme

Rotarian Volunteers in Action

Learning the disaster news from the media, Herbert K. Lau (劉敬恒), Charter President of Tolo Harbour Rotary Club (吐露港扶輪社), Hong Kong, initiated to make an emergency call to his good friend Rotarian Dr. Wong Chi-Wan (黃志雲醫師) of Tokyo Josai Rotary Club (東京城西ロータリークラブ), Japan---A Hong Kong Chinese who is plastic and reconstructive surgeon, and the younger brother of Past District 345 Governor Dr. Raymond C. W. Wong (黃志偉醫師). Without hesitation, Wong offered to organize a Japanese plastic surgeons team rush to Ulaanbaatar in healing those serious burn-wound victims, in his own expenses. Lau would have to be responsible to arrange all formalities with the Mongolian side.

Action in the British Crown Colony Hong Kong, Lau immediately communicated with President G. Boshigt to see if The Rotary Club of Ulaanbaatar would shoulder this mission and to provide necessary logistic support locally. If yes, the Rotary Club would have to:

- (1) Obtain special working visas from the immigration for 4 Japanese plastic surgeons to enter/exit the country in June 1996;
- (2) Obtain special permit from the Health Ministry to authorize temporary charity medical practice by foreign doctors in the country;
- (3) Obtain special permit from the customs to allow free-of-tax import of medical instrument and medicine for the charity purpose of healing burn-wound victims;
- (4) Arrange special theatre for plastic surgery in a local hospital in Ulaanbaatar;
- (5) Arrange critical patients, who needed to restore skin function and appearance after severe burns, from the rural area to stay in Ulaanbaatar for treatment;
- (6) Arrange local Mongolian plastic surgeons to assist and to learn the Japanese techniques from the surgery demonstration;
- (7) Arrange food and accommodation for the Japanese team who would be responsible for their own expenses.

Very efficiently, the above 7 requirements were quickly confirmed. The 4 surgeons in Tokyo immediately temporarily closed their private clinic for appointments. On 15 June 1996 they brought along the necessary instrument and adequate medicine and then rush to Ulaanbaatar. From Hong Kong, Lau also flew to Ulaanbaatar to serve as the liaison officer between the surgeon team and the local Mongolian medical personnel.

No ceremony, no party, no banquet, no sight-seeing, Dr. Wong led his 3 Japanese colleagues---not Rotarians---focused on healing the most critical cases as many as possible during their one week stay. They maximized their expertise on the vocational service, leaving behind their love of humanity and their technique of plastic surgery.

That is the truth of [Service Above Self].



15 June 1996 – At the Chinggis Khaan International Airport, President G. Boshigt held the Club Flag to welcome the arrival of 4 plastic surgeons from Tokyo, Japan. At the right of Boshigt was the team leader Rotarian Dr. Wong Chi-Wan and the 3 member Japanese surgeons.

