

Humanitarian agencies respond to North Korea flood disaster

by Colum Graham
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South Korea, the World Food Program and the Red Cross have acted in response to recent flooding that has left at least 33 dead, 18 missing, and over 50,000 displaced in North Korea. Around 13,000 hectares of farmland have been devastated, leaving crops ruined and drinking water unsafe. To mitigate the disaster, the World Food Program **has sent** 460 tonnes of maize, which is to be rationed at 400 grams per day for a month. The South Korean government **has provided** around US\$ 6 million through UNICEF despite a worsening in relations since Park Geun-hye became president. The Red Cross **has also begun** a relief operation with more than 3,300 volunteers that will reportedly last until October.

The North Korean government is reportedly not resisting immediate humanitarian assistance for the flooding. In **dialog with Devex**, Pamela Meston, the Red Cross's disaster management delegate for North Korea, reported that the biggest problem her teams are facing is damaged infrastructure preventing access and communication. Meston was pensive on the possibility of North Korean government interference after roads to the affected areas are repaired. Indeed, what the disaster represents for future aid delivery in North Korea remains unclear. Aid organisations in North Korea have been operating in **particularly difficult circumstances** since March when new sanctions forced the Bank of China to sever ties with North Korea's Foreign Trade Bank. In 1999, the politicisation of the North Korean famine by all parties **arguably distracted attention** away from more humanitarian action. What will happen for 2.8 million North Koreans in need of regular food assistance this time?

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