

The Current Situation of Sudden Natural Disaster Emergency Management of Our Government

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Abstract

By elaborating on the knowledge of sudden natural disasters and emergency management and Wenchuan earthquake relief and the current situation our government in dealing with sudden natural disasters, this paper analysis in sudden natural disaster emergency management the government still exists: the emergency of the subject is single, institutional setup is not reasonable, early warning monitoring mechanism emergency management and the laws and regulations are not sound, idea of public relief is not strong, lack of emergency information system and the emergency relief materials reserve is unreasonable.

Key words: Emergency; Natural disaster; Research status

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1. THE CONNOTATION OF NATURAL DISASTER

Natural disaster refers to the natural phenomenon which is harm to the survival of mankind or damage to the living environment of human. According to Guo Ji, natural disasters are occurring in the process in the ecological system; it can lead to the lost stability and balance of social and economic system, the loss of social property or lead to serious imbalance in society in the supply and demand of various primary organic resources. The understanding of natural disasters is generally divided into

broad sense and narrow sense. This article is mainly on the narrow understanding of natural disasters, only refers to the sudden natural disasters.

The sudden natural disasters are mainly divided into: drought, flood, typhoon, hail, sand storms and other weather disasters; earthquakes, landslides, debris flow and other geological disasters; storm surge, tsunami, red tide disasters and other ocean disasters; forest and grassland fires, crop diseases and pests and other biological hazards, a total of four categories. The above natural disasters have suddenness, which challenge the disaster prevention and treatment. The government should play a more active role in emergency management. There are some slow changes in natural phenomena, such as: land desertification, solemnization, sea level rise, seawater intrusion and so on, which cause loss or misfortune to human beings. But these phenomena occur slowly, without the sudden characteristics, are not belong to the research of government emergency management of natural disasters in this article.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF GOVERNMENT EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT LEGISLATION

After the founding of new China, the government emergency management legislation is more dispersive, and disaster emergency law mainly scattered in different disaster laws, special disaster emergency law is rare, such as "Destructive Earthquake Emergency Regulations", "Geological Disaster Emergency Law", "Meteorological Disaster Emergency Law", "Environmental Protection Law of the People's Republic of China", "Mine Safety Law of the people's Republic of China" and so on. From the reality of that time, they can deal with some common disasters, but when disaster occurred in chain reaction, or in unusual situation, it is lack of adequate legal basis to

carry out emergency work. Then in March, 1994, Chinese government issued “China’s Agenda in Twenty-first Century”, which cleared the relation between mitigation and ecological environmental protection from the national level, put improving the natural disaster management level, strengthening the system construction of disaster prevention and reducing of natural disasters caused by human factors as the important part of the agenda. In April, 1998, the state promulgated “Disaster Mitigation Planning of the people’s Republic of China (1998—2010)”, which raised the guidelines, development goals, the main task and the specific measures of the national disaster reduction as special planning the first time to promote the legalization process to respond to natural disasters.

China’s emergency management developed after 2003 “SARS”, a series of laws and regulations were enacted, and gradually disaster reduction work was taken into the legal track, which is mainly around the emergency plan, emergency management system, mechanism and legal system, and through several important stages of development:

1st. Bud: On April 14, 2003, premier Wen Jiabao in National anti-SARS conference put forward the construction of public health emergency reaction mechanism, which achieved “central unified command, and local levels are responsible; standardize the management in accordance with the law, ensure rapid response; improve the detection system and early warning capacities; improve the basic conditions to guarantee the continuous running.” In May, China promulgated and implemented “Sudden Public Health Incident Emergency Regulations”, emergent public health events were taken into the orbit of legal system. In November, the State Council established emergency plan working group to promote the public emergency plan preparation work and emergency system, mechanism and legal system construction.

2nd. Formulation: On April 6 and May 22, 2004, the State Council Office separately issued “The Relevant Departments under the State Council and The Formulation and Revision Unit Public Emergencies Emergency Plan Framework Guide” and “The Provinces (Autonomous Regions and Municipalities) People’s Government Public Emergencies Overall Emergency Plan Framework Guide”. On April 17, 2005, the State Council formally issued “The Overall Contingency Plan of National Public Emergencies”. In 2006 after the fourth session of the tenth National People’s Congress, emergency management work has been listed in the national economic and social development plan for the first time. To establish and perfect system and operation mechanism of dealing with the major natural disaster emergency, regulate the emergency rescue behavior, “The National Natural Disaster Relief Emergency Plan” was promulgated.

In May, the 138th State Council executive meeting passed in principle “The Emergency Response Law (draft)”. On August 30, 2007, “The Public Emergencies Response Law of the People’s Republic of China” was issued, and formally implemented in November 1. It is the first comprehensive strong special law that comes from practice, and it is the experience Chinese people struggling with disaster emergency such as natural disasters, accidents for a long time, which marks significant steps on the road of managing the emergency work in standardization, systematization and legalization.

3. Practice: 2008 is not an extraordinary year. “The Public Emergencies Response Law of the People’s Republic of China” played an important role in dealing with two major natural disasters, the south blizzard at the beginning of the year and Wenchuan earthquake in May. On June 9, “Wenchuan Earthquake Reconstruction Regulations” was enacted. Our government decided May 12 each year as the national “disaster prevention and reduction day” from 2009. On May 11, 2009, the State Council Information Office published white paper “China’s Relief Disasters Action”, which introduced the development of disaster reduction condition in China. It marks our country be maturity step by step in construction of emergency legal system.

3. THE ANALYSIS OF CURRENT GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT MODE TO SETTLE SUDDEN NATURAL DISASTER EMERGENCY—TAKE WENCHUAN EARTHQUAKE AS AN EXAMPLE

3.1 Wenchuan Earthquake Relief Process

According to the National Seismic Network measurement, 14:28, May 12, a magnitude 8 earthquake occurred in Wenchuan, Sichuan. After the earthquake, the CPC Central Committee General Secretary Hu Jintao gave important instructions immediately; Premier Wen Jiabao immediately went to Sichuan to direct earthquake relief work. The State Council established the earthquake relief headquarters, Wen Jiabao as commander in chief, and eight earthquake relief group were set up such as the rescue group composed by the relevant departments, army, armed police forces and the local party committees, the main person in the government, the forecast monitoring group, medical and health group, life settlement group, infrastructure group, production recovery group, security group, and propaganda group. China Seismological Bureau launched A level plan. According to “The National Natural Disaster Relief Emergency Plan”, the National Disaster Reduction Committee started national level of disaster relief emergency response, and immediately went to Wenchuan disaster area to help guide the earthquake

rescue. All localities and departments and the society from all walks take the spirit of “When trouble occurs at one spot, help comes from all quarters”, and actively invest a lot of manpower, material and financial resources, and support the disaster area earthquake relief. According to the CPC Central Committee deployment, the earthquake relief was taken strongly, smoothly, and continuously.

3.2 The Characteristics of Wenchuan Earthquake Emergency Relief

First, the quick response. After the earthquake, the General Secretary Hu Jintao immediately made important instructions, and held the political bureau standing committee meeting overnight, established earthquake relief headquarters, and deployed earthquake relief work comprehensively. Prime Minister Wen Jiabao took up the role himself as commander in chief in earthquake relief, went to the disaster area to command and provide disaster relief in the first time, while on the plane held an emergency meeting on the deployment of relief; National Disaster Reduction Committee started secondary response; The army also in the first time launched the emergency response plan, and made advance preparation and subsequent rapid intervention; Professional rescue teams arrived in the affected areas quickly to offer rescue work.

Second, timely and effectively. Because of the rapid response of the governments at all levels, the relief is very effective. Under the strong leadership of the CPC Central Committee, the State Council and the Central Military Commission, and the overall effort and close cooperation of the governments at all levels and social parties, the earthquake relief work has made important progress. Governments at all levels put large amounts of funds, allocated and transported relief tents, quilts, clothing, and state grain reserves. A large number of life materials ensure the disaster relief work carrying out smoothly.

Third, insist on principle of humanity. The goal of disaster relief from the beginning is to save lives, search and rescue the survivors trapped in the ruins, assemble medical power to cure the injured people. After the earthquake Hu Jintao made important instructions: “Rescue the wounded as soon as possible, protect the disaster area people’s lives.” “In any case, escape the 100000 people, that’s an order!” This is the premier Wen Jiabao’s speech when he inspected the harder-hit area. Put the interests, wishes and requirements of the people above everything, greater than all and before everything, this is what scientific socialism core value, also is a flag of the earthquake relief.

Fourth, information transparency. The earthquake disaster, situation, disaster relief work and all related information are in an unprecedented public transparent from the first moment. The earthquake publicly reported in less than half an hour after it happened. The media reported comprehensively in the first time, and for several days published a large number of various news and

casualties data. China Central Television did 24 hours continuous rolling reports about earthquake disaster relief, which ensured the people who concern the disaster relief can get the latest information at any time. The government announced the latest information of the disaster, earthquake relief, and public donations. A large number of media including foreign media reporters were allowed to go to the disaster area for interviews and reports.

Fifth, coordinated and orderly. This includes synergies between domestic different levels and different departments of the government agencies, the cooperation between government and all kinds of social enterprises and institutions and non-governmental organizations as well as all kinds of international humanitarian assistance. Faced with such a severe disaster, the government treated calmly, deployed quickly, took relief measures decisively, scheduled scientifically, directed with perfect ease. Forces and all the rescue teams rushed to the disaster area. Provision, transportation, distribution of goods and materials from all directions, and the mobilization, disbursement, expenditure of hundreds of millions of money were in tension and order.

3.3 Rescue Team at Home and Abroad, Non-Governmental Organizations Actively Participate in Disaster Relief

3.3.1 Rescue Organization and Disaster Relief Team at Home and Abroad Widely Participate in Wenchuan Earthquake Relief Work

Practice has proved, the participation of the social organizations in disaster relief is an effective way. Their participation in the disaster relief is quickly. On May 12 evening, Nanjing Amity Foundation established disaster relief office in Chengdu, and granted 1 million emergency procurement saving materials. That night, Jet Li One Foundation also started collection of donations. May 13, the non-governmental organizations such as Friends of Nature, the Green Peace, Green Homeland Volunteers jointly sponsored earthquake relief work, and nearly 30 NGOs join in. On May 14, “Heart to Heart International” came into Beichuan disaster area. A nongovernmental league organization Sichuan Relief Joint Office was founded in Chengdu. By May 23, the joining NGOs became more than 100. They participated in disaster relief spontaneously, involved in material distribution, information communication, or in the home front provided all kinds of support for earthquake relief. They made a positive contribution in the rescue.

At the same time, foreign aid organizations have also involved, Japan’s Foreign Ministry, Maritime Safety Agency sent international emergency rescue team. A group of 31 people on May 15, 21:30 arrived in Chengdu. Russian State Emergency Rescue Team arrived in China on May 16. On 17,14:00, rescue teams in Dujiangyan rescued a survivor in Baoren Temple. Rescue team from South Korea including 41 people arrived in Sichuan on

May 16, and in Yinghua County, Shifang City carried out searching and rescuing work. Rescue teams of Singapore arrived in Hongbai County, Shifang City on May 17. Cuba rescue teams including 35 medical personnels arrived in Chengdu in the evening of May 23. Medical team of Italy including 25 medical technical personnels built five large inflatable medical tents in Mianzhu. German medical team in Dujiangyan set up a mobile general hospital to meet the daily needs of 250000 people. England, France, Pakistan and Indonesia also sent the medical team to disaster area in Sichuan province.

3.3.2 The Participation of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Disaster Relief Needs to be Improved

Because the large number of volunteers involved in, and the multiple combinations, it's lack of organization. The low level of organization caused volunteers rear-service insurance insufficient, which influenced rescue effect. Even some volunteers alone went to the disaster area, and were lack for the protection and became the victims. Secondly, the volunteers did not have the professional knowledge and skills, it is difficult for them to competent for the rescue work, and at last, some but become the object of rescue. Finally, the disaster relief of volunteers is not for material reward, cannot pick and choose work-sharing. So a lot of volunteers did not give themselves a correct orientation, held the attitude of experiencing life, even for "the disaster area tourism", which will not only be spat at by the public, but also destroyed the volunteers' image. So the volunteers in organizations need standard

management, so as to play its positive role better.

3.4 From Wenchuan Earthquake Relief to See the Current Government Emergency Relief Pattern

Wenchuan earthquake in China is not only a "big test" of the emergency management, but also a test of the current existing government relief model. From the high attention of party and state leaders, rapid response, unified leadership, coordination of each department, we can see, the current operation mode of our country is: the governments centralize the department responsible for the division of labor. Prime Minister Wen Jiabao acted as commander in chief, set up many disaster relief headquarters. The State Council lead unified, by coordination and organization of the National Disaster Reduction Committee, the State Council Earthquake Relief Headquarters and other related departments, the local governments at all levels made arrangements and aroused the people according to the actual situation. In the process of disaster relief, we made full use of Chinese People's Liberation Army, Armed Police Forces and the Militia Organizations and Public Security Police and Commandos, people's organizations, social organizations and international aid organizations participated in disaster relief. That is a temporary, un-standing mechanism, under the leadership of one or more specific department coordination to deal with sudden natural disasters, through the whole nation's unity efforts, we have gained the earthquake relief stage victory, but also exposed some substantial problem, still need further perfect.

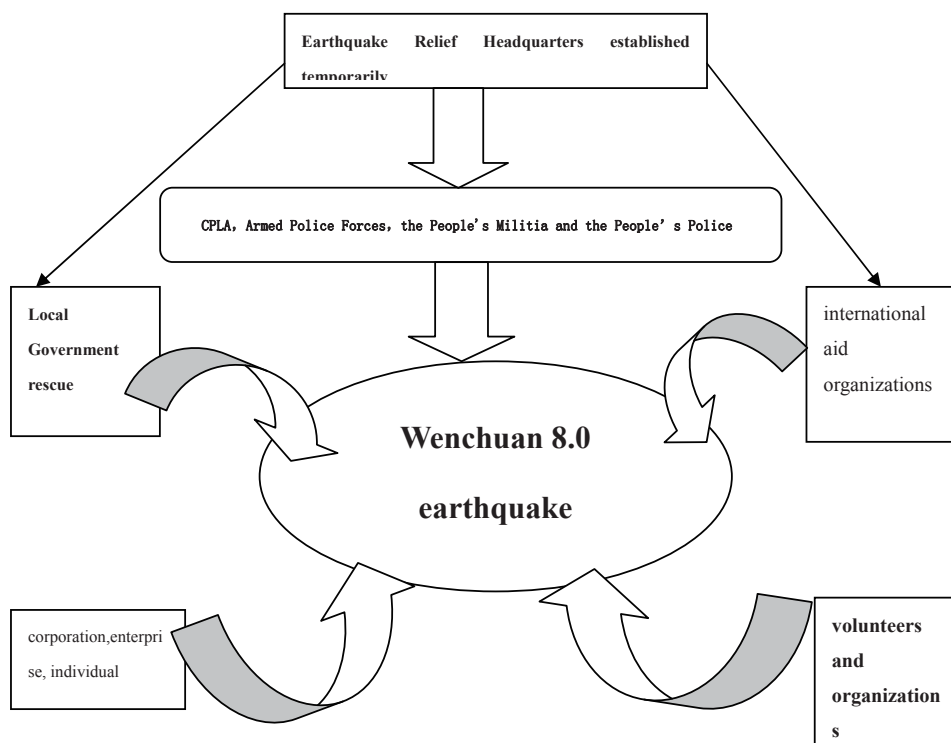


Figure 1
Wenchuan Earthquake Emergency Relief Ideograph

4. THE SUCCESSES OF GOVERNMENT TO DEAL WITH SUDDEN NATURAL DISASTERS

4.1 Establish a Relative Complete Emergency Management System

In January 2006, the State Council formally promulgated "The Overall Contingency Plan of National Public Emergencies", clearly define the information release rules of emergency early warning, process and rehabilitation work. On August 30th, 2007, "The Public Emergencies Response Law of the People's Republic of China" released and on November 1 formally implemented, which established emergency prevention and emergency reserve system, monitoring system, early warning system, emergency treatment and rescue system, the restoration and reconstruction system, and legal liability system. At the same time, in the information publicity and media supervision, we adhere to the principle of transparency and the doctrine of publicity. The government can quickly organize media through the comprehensive and integrated communication, form the mainstream public opinion, give play to social integration and social mobilization function in emergency disaster. The continuous improvement of the emergency system and the rapid and efficient implementation laid a solid foundation in taking the stage victory against disaster relief.

4.2 The Ruling Party and the Government Always Keep Highly Responsible Spirit

The major sudden natural disasters threat the people's lives and property safety directly, and are related to the vital interests of the people. The Party Central Committee always pay high attention to the emergencies, and always keep attitude of high responsible for the people, make arrangement deployment in the first time at the highest levels of meeting. After the Wenchuan earthquake, the central leaders came to the spot themselves, and quickly established earthquake relief headquarters, inspired people quickly to carry out earthquake relief, to solve different kinds of problems timely and effectively. Secondly, adhere to the people-centered governing idea in the relief, and always put the people's lives in the first place, and do our best to save their lives. After the earthquake, the Party Central Committee put forward: "The people's lives are higher than all, saving lives is the top priority, and we should try our best to save people, as long as there is a ray of hope, we will try one hundred times the effort." At the same time, we made appropriate arrangements for people afflicted by the disaster, think as the masses think, help people who need help, and relief team help people tide over the difficulties by persistence. In 72 hours

after the quake, the rescue team determined according to the government's instructions and requirements, and successfully rescued ten survivors. Four of them were buried up to 125 hours, 144 hours, 145 hours and 164 hours, especially on May 19, 10:42 in Beichuan County a 61-year-old Li Mingcui was rescued and helped out of the ruins, which hold Sichuan dialect clearly said: "Long live the Communist Party, thanks for help."

4.3 China's Socialist System has Strong Integration Control Ability for Disaster Relief Resources

Concentration on to do great things is a superiority of the socialist system, which is reflected in the disaster emergency management. After the Wenchuan earthquake, the State Council Earthquake Relief Headquarters assembled the national disaster relief resources, set up a command and control system of army, police, fire control, medical treatment, and other units in one, gathered rescue strength and relief supplies from all over the country to the disaster area rapidly. According to the requirements of the Central Military Commission, the people's army overcomes difficulties, got into the huge earthquake disaster area to rescue people. 146000 soldiers, from senior to ordinary, heroically take responsibility for earthquake relief and the most difficult and most dangerous work. The Ministry of Civil Affairs, the Relief Office, the Social Security and other related departments acted positively. The state administrative, legislative, and judicial departments coordinated closely, operated efficiently to win time for disaster relief, provided the necessary resources to support, dispatched relief tents, quilts, clothes and the central grain reserves with the fastest speed to the disaster area, achieved the integration of social resources to the maximum in the shortest possible time.

4.4 Make Full Use of the Positive Role of Disaster Relief Organizations at Home and Abroad

In the basis of macro scheduling of the central in relief, we adhere to the mass line, give play to the role of people in disaster relief, mobilize the people of the whole country, mass prevention and mass treatment, integrated defense, and actively support and promote social forces to participate in disaster prevention and disaster relief, encourage volunteers to participate in disaster mitigation action, raise and appropriate earthquake relief donation of individuals and organizations at home and abroad, accept all kinds of aid from the international community, work together with all the country, social organizations and friendly people who support and help China earthquake relief, join hands to face with disaster, as many countries sent rescue teams to participate in Wenchuan earthquake relief mentioned above.

5. THE PROBLEMS THE GOVERNMENT TO DEAL WITH SUDDEN NATURAL DISASTER

5.1 The Organization Establishment is not Reasonable

At present our country has no unified national emergency management and coordination agency relief system. The governments play a leading role in emergency relief, which is departmental and single. The governments take on almost all of the disaster relief items, and we lack of comprehensive rescue team. The system of sensitive coordination has not been formed. After the disaster, the governments often establish temporary headquarters, temporary agencies to deal with emergency incidents. But temporary headquarters have inevitable defects. First of all, they do not have continuity, after dealing with emergency, the temporary headquarters will be dissolved or cancel. It is a waste that the valuable lessons in disaster relief can't keep. Secondly, temporary relief agencies need many departments, the vertical management of various departments in coordination and cooperation of the mechanism is relatively complete, but the mechanism between responsibility and division of labor relations is not clear. Offside, dislocation and omission in the emergency management coexist, which made the efficiency of emergency decision and disposal low and the cost of management increased.

5.2 The Emergency Management Early Warning Monitoring Mechanism Remains to be Perfect

First of all, early warning monitoring mechanism is not perfect. After the outbreak of the crisis, the government often "swot up", and formed a "fireman" type of passive reaction model. "China Emergency Report" mentioned: "Early warning monitoring system collect disaster information through the space station, media, equipments, social rumors, monitor and evaluate abnormality of the disasters. Although for a long time we summarize the experiences, and have some related knowledge about the disaster signs before the outbreak, it is still not enough. In blizzard in 2008 and Wenchuan earthquake, early warning monitoring system did not play its role."¹ Secondly, the construction risk indicator evaluation system is not perfect, the National Disaster Reduction Committee in Wenchuan after the earthquake advanced the level reaction is 2, which is not reasonable, and change to level 1 in night. The magnitude of the earthquake is 7.6, then to 7.8, and finally to 8.0. So the corresponding level standard of natural disasters still needs to be improved.

5.3 Emergency Laws And Regulations are not Perfect

The current situation of sudden disaster emergency management in our country is very severe. The special

legislation lags behind; the legislative construction is not perfect. Now there are only "The Emergency Response Law", "The State's Overall Emergency Plan", "Natural Disaster Relief Emergency Plan" and some related plans. It is still far from adaption to the development of natural disasters in our country. Many legal relationship and adjustment problems in disaster emergency rescue are lawless, and to a certain extent the use of administrative means of regulation and control of the state replace the function of the law, which marked with a man-rule color, in the long run it is not standard, and needs legal norm effect.

5.4 The Public Emergency Disaster Awareness is not Strong

All the time, there is a tendency of "heavy rescue, light prevention" in disaster response. The implementation of the principle "prevention first, combination of the prevention and forecast, prevention and emergency are equal" is not complete. We should see the purpose of emergency management is not to provide disaster relief, but the disaster prevention and mitigation. Secondly, the government ignored the grass-roots work, ignored the education and training of the public emergency, and the public crisis consciousness is not strong. Since there is no specific law to guide and regulate, the relevant departments did not guide the public to learn more emergency relief knowledge, the terms of institutionalization rules to improve the sense of crisis were not put into practice and so on, all in all, people lack of overall disaster knowledge, the anti-disaster ability is low, and they lack of the spirit of "make provision for rainy days". From the snow disaster happened in 2008 we can see, people were inadequately prepared ideologically in dealing with ice and snow disaster. Some local authorities did not take it seriously enough, ignored the crisis consciousness training. And because of the lack of knowledge of disaster prevention and mitigation, and have no acute crisis judgment ability, when the crisis happen, people lack of emergency psychological preparation and preventive measures, and cause psychological panic and destruction of normal life order.

5.5 Lack of Disaster Emergency Information System

Lack of information refers to lack of emergency relief information system at present in our country. From the theory of information analysis, a team in emergency management should adhere to the principle of information priority, relief work carried out smoothly or no, the key is to see whether the disaster information is accurate and timely. Information error cause decision-making errors, information interruption have a serious impact on disaster evaluation, relief arrangement, resource allocation, policy adjustment and so on. In Wenchuan earthquake, the information infrastructure construction is not perfect,

¹ China Emergency Report, China Economic Times Press, 2009.1.

and information was interrupted, the contact was cut off in Wenchuan, Yingxiu, Beichuan, and other areas, and the people in these place cannot be rescued. At the same time, in the first few days in disaster relief, because the government did not timely set up a special information system for disaster emergency, the government lacked of information about the epicenter, they had to collected materials temporarily for decision deployment, which seriously affected the efficiency and processes of disaster relief.

5.6 Emergency Relief Materials Reserve Recovery and Rehabilitation Measures Still Need to be Strengthened

At present, the government in emergency reserve is not scientific. Its mainly behave in: the reserve is insufficient and incomplete, reserve distribution is not scientific. The insufficient of reserve is mainly in performance of local materials reserve, including food, medicines, tents and other items. The government has no special local reserves; the material reserve was obviously in shortage in the snow and freeze disaster in 2008. There were no special machinery of clear snow de-icing; the lack of chain, straw bag, bag, industrial salt affected the ability to fight the disaster relief to a certain extent. Secondly, reserve incomplete mainly refers to that there was no corresponding relief communication equipment, no special relief experts team and health care team, etc., which made emergency relief work to be passive. Finally, reserve resources management is not scientific. In the south province during the snowstorm in 2008, a province assembled a large number of bags, they did not know that there are bags in disaster preparation warehouse; only belong to the state reserve. The reserve information between departments lacks of mutual coordination. Emergency reserve work is related to the relief of the overall situation, and the relief departments must take attention of it.

In the reconstruction and rehabilitation, our government has been outstanding. Every time after the disaster, the government always leaves no stone to help disaster recovery infrastructure construction. However, we should also play a more prominent role in social security, insurance, because the calamity loss is difficult to measure without corresponding rehabilitation evaluation mechanism. The phenomenon of poor due to disasters happen from time to time if the affected groups of compensation is unable to achieve the perfect social security, the compensation level has not been fully play. Secondly, in the rehabilitation treatment, only economic compensation is not enough, we can not ignore psychological intervention to the families of the victims and some cadres at the grassroots level who bear the emergency relief responsibility. The number concerned

about is big and the area is large in disaster, psychological unbalance of the families of the victims is weak, they also have a psychological intervention measures in a long time after disaster. We should provide counseling services to this part of the social public as far as possible to bridge their psychological trauma, to prevent the adverse consequences caused by aggressive behaviors. The case that Beichuan county Party Committee Propaganda Department vice minister Feng Xiang committed suicide by hanging himself at home because it is difficult to endure the suffering lost of children in the earthquake deeply tell us: on the one hand is to do a good job in the psychological intervention of the general public, on the other hand is the psychological counseling of the cadres on the first line in the disaster area, both are not allowed to ignore.

Our country is in the the key period of socialist modernization construction. Along with the increase of natural and human factors, the occurrence of sudden natural disasters is more and more frequent. The occurrence of disasters causes heavy loss to people's lives and property, and cause serious damage to our country's economic construction and social development. Improving the ability of the government to deal with sudden natural disaster is extremely urgent.

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