Difficulties involving a lack of timely funding and in producing Family Food Parcels (FFP's) caused delays in initiating the assistance programme for vulnerable groups in far north-eastern Russia. With many of the constraints now resolved, the objectives of the operation are being reached and distribution of assistance will begin in May and last through July. The recent donor support has also provided the required funding to proceed with the procurement of medical and hygiene kits.

The context

Economic difficulties in Russia have resulted in a rise in unemployment and a steady erosion of living standards. Poor harvests have worsened the situation, affecting the population, particularly for the vulnerable groups in the remote far north-eastern regions of Chukotka, Kamchatka, including Koryak okrug, and Magadan.

Other factors have compounded the problems in these areas, such as the geographic isolation, the harsh climate, poor infrastructure, lack of economic diversity, high cost of transport, over-dependence on imports, and the loss of subsidies. Due to the lack of funds to transport regular winter supplies (fuel, medicines etc. which normally delivered by the Northern shipping route during ice-free months), a full complement of supplies was not sent this past winter.

The region is also afflicted with environmental problems as a result of many by-products released from nuclear and chemical stations.

The operation planned to:
- alleviate the impact of cold, malnutrition, disease, stress, and lack of medical care to 82,000 indigenous people (multi-child families, single parents, former prisoners, pensioners, orphans, invalids);
- maximise the use of available local resources (human, goods, and services);
- strengthen local capacities by providing infrastructure support; and
- promote partnerships between Participating National Societies and the RRC.

The Federation is also carrying out two other relief operations in conjunction with this programme:

The TB/HIV/AIDS/STDs programme, launched on 12 March.

**Latest events**

Supplies of food and fuel to 12 million people in the far northeast are now threatened by financial troubles that may halt shipping during the brief navigation season in May. The main transportation company serving this areas has refused to transport supplies until the government pays the last winter debt amounting to USD 2 million. If the needed supplies are not transported during the approaching summer period, the affected population will again require assistance.

A Russian Red Cross assessment to Taimyr has revealed the alarming nature of the situation, and a more in-depth assessment of the long-term humanitarian and rehabilitation needs will be undertaken in the entire north of Russia, particularly emphasising the need of the indigenous people. A pledge of USD 25,000 has been made by the Wallenburg Institute (Sweden) to assist in this study.

**Red Cross/Red Crescent action**

The procurement of 81,000 FFPs for Magadan and Kamchatka (including Koryak Okrug) was approved, and delivery is planned for May-July with monitoring following distribution. Each food parcel will contain 2 kg of wheat flour, 1 kg of sugar, 2 kg of macaroni, 1 litre of vegetable oil, 2 cans of meat, 2 cans of condensed milk, 1 kg of semolina, and 0.5 kg of tea. Approximately 200 distribution points were selected among all four regions, and there is still a possibility to deliver the cargo by winter roads (ice paths across the tundra) with minimum transportation expenses.

Tenders for the procurement of FFPs in Chukotka are being held and results will be analysed as received. Tenders for the production of medical and hygiene kits are ongoing in all four regions and in Moscow.

Medical and first aid kits, blankets and bed linen sets have been procured, as well as 250 health centre kits (for territorial hospitals and other health institutions). Obstetrical sets will also be procured as soon as the Russian Red Cross and the Federation agree on standards and modalities.

The Canadian Red Cross-funded delegate for the operation arrived in the middle of April, and is already participating in organisation meetings with NGOs and regional Red Cross societies. A relief delegate is expected to come on 3 May from the Swedish Red Cross, and a health delegate from Canada is arriving on 1 May to concentrate on assessment and training in the Far Northeast. While it had been planned to base a relief administrator in Chukotka, no candidate has been selected for this position as yet.

Several visits to the regions to meet with the local authorities and RC committees representatives are planned for the middle of May.

Development assistance has taken an initiative within the frames of the relief operation in the Far East. An information exchange, training and capacity-building seminar for the chairpersons of the involved Red Cross committees in the four regions will be held approximately on 24-25 May in Moscow.

A meeting to discuss development plans within the ongoing relief operation in the Far East will be conducted on 1-2 May in Minsk with the participation of the Russian Red Cross, the Federation's Co-operation Department, and the Head of Delegation in Moscow. The Canadian Red Cross expressed
its interest in looking into, and possibly supporting, future development of Red Cross branches and projects in the Far East.

**Outstanding needs**

Cash donations are essential in order to continue the programme and to allow the provision of aid to extremely vulnerable people in Evenkia and Taimyr.

There is an urgent need of a relief administrator in Chukotka to conduct further assessment and monitoring.

**External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media**

Close co-operation between the Federation, the RRC, and the local Red Cross committees and authorities is continuing with regular meetings and other contacts. On 20 April a meeting with representatives of the Russian Association of Indigenous Minorities of the North, Siberia, and the Far East was held to discuss its participation in the programme, particularly in monitoring. An important meeting with the governor of Chukotka will be held on 30 April to discuss the questions of the Red Cross's collaboration with local authorities and also to meet with food parcel producers.

The programme continues to get media support in the local newspapers, radio and TV. A BBC team conducted a five-day field trip to Magadan on 5-10 April, with the Federation Representative and the regional Red Cross chairlady participating. Apart from the raising awareness of the severe living conditions in the region, the mission delivered 100 food parcels to the vulnerable population of Seimchan and a reindeer-breeders settlement.

**Contributions**

See Annex 1 for details.

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This and other reports on Federation operations are available on the Federation's website: [http://www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)