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RED CROSS & RED CRESCENT INFORMATION

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This report is published daily as a general update on Red Cross Red Crescent activities during the Balkans crisis, targeting primarily the Movement's components and supporters. Today's text can also be found on the internet: www.ifrc.org and www.icrc.org

LATEST EVENTS

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Due to power cuts across 90% of the country over the last two days, it is almost impossible to obtain new information from the field. Power has been gradually restored, but many parts of Belgrade as well as other big cities remain affected. The Yugoslav Red Cross headquarters and Red Cross Red Crescent offices in the city have also been without electricity, with the generator operating sporadically.

International Federation Under Secretary General Margareta Wahlstrom, on a three day visit to the Federal Republic, yesterday held talks with the Yugoslav Red Cross, ICRC, the Federation delegation and Yugoslav authorities and also conducted a very well attended press conference at the National Society head quarters. More than 30 representatives of national and foreign media covered the USG's programme.

Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

The situation in Macedonia has reached a critical stage, according to UNHCR. UNHCR confirmed on 5 May that Macedonian authorities had closed the border with Kosovo, Yugoslavia. Several thousand people managed to cross the border yesterday, but 1,000 were forcibly pushed back into FRY from the buffer zone, according to UNHCR which was present at the time. The 2,600 new arrivals were taken to the Cegrane camp which now has some 33,000 residents.

The departure of refugees to third countries continued, but at a trickle. Some 470 people departed for the US on 5 May, with another 1,130 people departing for Austria, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania and Turkey between the 4-5 May. Rising temperatures mean that conditions in the camps will deteriorate even further, and the Red Cross intends to reinforce its operations in Blace.

Relief Distribution: A kindergarten for refugee children in Skopje was provided with blankets, diapers, milk, fruit juice, biscuits, wheat flour, sugar, rice and baby parcels (American Red

Cross donation) from relief stocks on Wednesday (5 May) after requests from the Social Welfare department at the headquarters of the Macedonian Red Cross (MRC).

April distributions of relief by branches of the MRC are coming to a close. A total of 76,000 refugees living with host families received food and non-food (provided by the International Federation) relief items despite initial planning figures for 46,000 beneficiaries. An additional 3,000 beneficiaries (refugees who have not been covered by the relief systems in place for various reasons) have received limited quantities of food items, soap and used clothing.

The relief distribution planning figure for May will be increased to include 130,000 refugees, 18,000 host families and several local thousand social cases. At present, there are over 108,000 refugees registered with the Macedonian Red Cross, but planning figures reflect the need for a buffer stock as the number of beneficiaries continues to rise at a dramatic pace.

Health: Palestinian Red Crescent health delegates were provided orientation at the German Red Cross field hospital in the Stenkovec-Brazda camp. Staff for the new Norwegian Red Cross field hospital in the Cegrane camp will be composed of Norwegian, Palestinian and German delegates. Several Palestinian delegates will be assigned to the Brazda hospital as well to provide proper representation of the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement in both facilities.

Shelter: UNHCR appealed for tents, needed in the new Cegrane camp, which is expanding quickly. An estimated 7,000 refugees were forced to spend the night in the open at the camp due to the lack of tents. The German Red Cross is forwarding 1,500 tents in response and will ensure delivery to the camp on Saturday.

Logistics: Dispatches from the International Federation's central warehouse on Tuesday (4 May) included: 2,000 blankets and 1,200 hygiene parcels to the Skopje branch; and two tents to the Cegrane camp for ICRC use. Incoming goods to the warehouse included: 999 cooking sets and 416 boxes of canned beans from the Iranian Red Crescent.

Tracing: The ICRC Tracing Service has registered 458 vulnerable cases (the majority of which are unaccompanied children, but also include elderly, physically and mentally disabled persons) as well as 1,088 tracing requests through Wednesday (5 May). The number of cases closed has increased to 192.

Participating National Societies: This past week, delegates from the American Red Cross (ARC) delegation visited the branches in Skopje, Debar, Struga, Gostivar and Tetovo to identify additional warehouse space needs, vehicle requirements and proposed staffing increases. ARC will be providing funds to these branches in order to expand their current operation and to ease the current distribution challenges they are facing.

In Skopje and Tetovo, 2,000 square metres of additional warehouse space will be added, while additional 1,000 square metres will be funded in Debar, Struga and Gostivar. In all five branches mentioned, two trucks will be rented for the distribution period and an additional 10-15 workers will be employed to help repack and distribute relief items.

External Relations, Information, and Publicity: International Red Cross and Red Crescent Information delegates conducted interviews or briefings with the following media on Wednesday (5 May): MTI (Hungarian news agency), two French-Canadian radio stations, Icelandic and Korean Red Cross media, Korean newspaper, USA Today, Radio Swiss (Italian), New York Times, a Macedonian newspaper, and the Boston Globe.

Albania

With 8,850 new arrivals, there are now a total of 415,382 refugees according to the Emergency Management Group (EMG). Of the 111,128 refugees located in the Kukes area, approximately 85,000 are currently accommodated with host families. Additional concerns were raised at the EMG meeting over the capacity of Kukes to accommodate the current level of refugees for an extended period. The latest estimates are that the water supply will not be sufficient past the month of June, and it is considered imperative that people be moved elsewhere.

The EMG does not offer information on the numbers of refugees that have left Albania and have been resettled in third countries, in line with the government's policy not to promote the resettlement of ethnic Albanians out of the immediate region.

Some 2,000 Albanian Red Cross volunteers in 36 local branches are assisting in the refugee crisis.

The redirection of refugees from Macedonia to Albania continues; some 6,000 ethnic Albanians are said to have crossed over from the neighbouring country in the last 24 hours.

Relief Distributions: Relief items dispatched to Elbasan included two trucks loaded with 1,000 mattresses, 1,000 hygiene kits, and 500 kitchen sets; one truck dispatched to Fier with 500 mattresses and 500 hygiene kits; one truck dispatched to Shkodra loaded with hygiene kits and medical materials; as well as 23 MT of wheat flour transported to Durres and 23 MT to Kruje. Distribution of supplies in Elbasan and Pogradec to cover needs for two weeks continued. WFP provided 72 Mt of wheat flour to the municipality of Shkodra and another 50 MT to the Red Cross, intended for the baking of bread.

Health: Medical personnel undertook assessment and treatment activities in Lac and Kukes on 5 May, and the Medical Co-ordinator traveled to Elbasan and Vlore to inspect the health status in those areas.

Some 100 first aid kits for delegates are scheduled to arrive soon, and will be distributed immediately.

Logistics: The Red Cross ferry arrived safely with its cargo of 20 trucks, which were all immediately dispatched to the field. The speed with which the customs officials are processing incoming goods has increased dramatically since the Ministry of Labour became involved.

Telecommunications: The installation of satellite communications and computer equipment for the joint delegation's Information Department was completed.

Tracing: Figures provided by the ICRC tracing service indicate the ongoing need for this essential service. In the first week of May there were 367 visits or calls to the service, 712 satellite telephone calls (made by refugees to relatives residing elsewhere), 462 typed radio messages, eight (8) cases of unaccompanied elderly, seven (7) tracing requests, 22 parents without children, five (5) unaccompanied children. Three children were transported from Kruma, and they will be reunited with their families in Korce. Seven (7) family reunion cases were opened and seven (7) were closed.

Preparation has begun on tracing information leaflets; separate ones will be produced for embassies and NGOs, and for the refugees themselves.

Awareness of unexploded ordinance: In Bajram Curri and Tropoje, 1,000 leaflets and 50 posters on the dangers of unexploded ordinance have been distributed to the local population.

Participating National Societies: Representatives from the National Societies of Great Britain and Sweden arrived. The Secretary General of the Canadian Red Cross completed his visit with the joint delegation and traveled back to Skopje. Swiss Red Cross representatives also finished their tour of the operations in Albania.

External Relations, Information, and Publicity: Information delegates were interviewed by Spanish National Radio, Deutsche Welle (Germany), CNN (America), Norwegian P4 radio, Dagbladet (Norway), French TV2 and TV3, BBC and SPEAR radio.

Outstanding Needs: Food assistance, and the means with which to distribute it, are of paramount importance to the success of the joint delegation's relief efforts in Albania. Refugees are increasing in number, particularly those in host families, and the joint delegation is finding it increasingly difficult to maintain the current level of assistance to the existing caseload.

Kukes Report

Today's refugee figures in the Kukes region are: 7,399 new arrivals and 3,260 refugees moved south (figures up to midnight, 5 May). The International Red Cross/Crescent action consisted of food relief to refugees who are accommodated in host families and Tracing/Message work. In addition, the Italian Red Cross and United Arab Emirates Red Crescent camps and the Finnish Red Cross Health Clinic support the refugee crisis.

A coordination meeting was held today between organisations operating in the Kukes region to examine the proposal of moving camps, complete with staff, further south. As each organisation has different standards, especially regarding feeding policies, discussions were also orientated around standardising care in the camps.

A special security meeting held on 4 May under the auspices of the UN Security Advisor addressed the issues of camp security, security at the border and security during distributions. Several options (NATO military police, UN civilian police force, private guards) are under consideration.

An estimated 4,000 IDPs have moved from their villages in northern Albania because of shelling, finding refuge away from the border. Due to security concerns, the Red Cross has not yet been able to reach the affected areas of Tropoje district.

Relief Distribution: The new relief programme, based on distributing food items to refugees in host families and host families, started today by stock-piling items at three distribution points. The distribution exercise, which is due to start on 7 May, is intended for 20,311 refugees and 1,024 host families. Each refugee will receive a weekly ration consisting of 2 Kg of wheat flour and a half food parcel equivalent to 2.5 Kg. Each host family will receive a ration every two weeks consisting of 1 food parcel equivalent to 5 Kg (wheat flour will be given once a month). The food parcel contains: 1 Kg each of the following: spaghetti; rice; sugar; canned vegetables and 0.345 Kg of canned fish; 0.5 Kg of dried fruits; and 1 piece of soap.

Logistics: The Red Cross Kukes Sub-delegation received 4 trucks loaded with 56 MT of food parcels, and 4 flights carrying food parcels. The trucks will be unloaded and the relief items will be sent directly to the distribution points in Kukes.

One ambulance has been transferred from Shkodra to Tirana, and the delegation is also in the process of sending two more ambulances and one ICRC vehicle to Tirana.

Health: The Red Cross hospitals and clinics were busy over the night of 5-6 May, treating new arrivals who came directly from the border. Children were especially dehydrated, with all the patients exhausted. The United Arab Emirates Red Crescent hospital treated 60 patients overnight, and expected the number to rise to 80. Three people were treated for gunshot wounds in the Italian Red Cross hospital, and several others in the United Arab Emirates Red Crescent hospital and the Finnish Red Cross clinic. The Finnish Red Cross clinic inoculated a further 250 children against measles and polio.

Tracing/Messages: One tracing request from a separated family and a further request from an elderly abandoned person were received, as well as two tracing requests for three abandoned children. Links with the parents have already been established through the satellite telephone office, so it is hoped that a family reunification will take place in Germany. Another case was opened concerning a family reunification in Switzerland for two elderly people and a mentally ill wife. The following telephone calls and radio messages from the Tracing Office and the MSF camp were recorded: 178 radio messages to 1,451 people (figures calculated when one person makes contact with their whole family) and 337 telephone calls to 2,700 people.

External Relations, Information, and Publicity: Spanish CNN television spent the day with the Spanish Red Cross Relief Delegate, focusing their attention on his experience in Kukes and the relief operation in general. The Finnish team producing a documentary for ECHO, and the French TV3, focused on relief distributions. Two Irish freelance journalists arrived at the Sub-delegation, and plan to follow the operational work of the International Red Cross/Rec Crescent in the Kukes region over the course of the next several days.

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