

# OPERATIONS UPDATE



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies  
Fédération Internationale des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge et du Croissant-Rouge  
Federación Internacional de Sociedades de la Cruz Roja y de la Media Luna Roja  
الاتحاد الدولي لجمعيات الصليب الأحمر والهلال الأحمر

## **RUSSIA – HOSTAGE CRISIS IN BESLAN, NORTH OSSETIA**

31 August 2005

*The Federation's mission is to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilizing the power of humanity. It is the world's largest humanitarian organization and its millions of volunteers are active in over 181 countries.*

### **In Brief**

**Appeal No. 19/2004;**

**Operations Update no. 5;**

**Period covered: May – August 2005).**

**Appeal coverage: 103.6% ; ([click here for live Contributions List](#))**

**Appeal history:**

- Emergency appeal launched 6 September 2004 for CHF 864,844 (USD 680,000/EUR 563,000) for 12 months to assist 2,000 beneficiaries [<click here>](#)
- Appeal budget revised to CHF 1,867,348 (USD 1,612,625 / EUR 1,234,490) to assist 5,000 beneficiaries until August 2006 [<click here>](#)
- Appeal budget revised to CHF 2,341,334 (USD 1.84 million/ EUR 1.51 million) [<click here>](#)

**Operational Summary:** This update marks the first anniversary of the tragic hostage crisis in Beslan. In the aftermath of the tragedy, the Red Cross continues to provide support to the communities affected by the siege. Visiting nurses have been providing psychological support to affected families at their homes. People have also been encouraged to join various activities in the RRC Centre through family meetings, public events, sports, educational sessions at art studios, and psychological counselling. The operation continues with the engagement of the authorities and various partners.

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## Background

A three-day siege of school N 1 with over 1,000 hostages inside in September 2004 ended with violent clashes that took killed 338 people (172 children) and left hundreds of injured, a tremendous loss for a small town of Beslan (North Ossetia) with a population of 32,000.

One year on, it is clear that the past 12 months have been very difficult for Beslan. Physical injuries have been treated in hospitals, both in Russia and abroad, but the tremendous psychological sufferings have been aggravated by disrupted social ties, both in families and the community.

Many children and adults are still deeply depressed. The chief doctor of the local hospital V. Karginov explained the situation: *“This year was extremely difficult for us, because every day we witnessed new illnesses of former hostages and their relatives. And we understand that the number of such diseases will grow with every day. Practically all former hostages and their relatives have had sessions with our psychiatrists and psychologists in the hospital. These days stress disorders have significantly sharpened, ”*

School N1 will soon be demolished, only the gym will be covered with a plastic roof and preserved as a monument on the request of relatives whose close ones perished here one year ago. The town is preparing to mark the one year anniversary of the tragedy between September 1 and 3. Memorial events will take place at school N1 and at the School Cemetery, as the Beslanese now call the town graveyard.

The School Cemetery looks different than one year ago: there are red marble stones in even rows at every grave. Women in black tenderly clean the stones and polish the pictures of two, three, ten-year-old children and their parents. Toys are everywhere together with flowers. Architects are finishing the work on the monument “Tree of sorrow”. The official opening ceremony will take place on September 3.

One year after the tragedy many of the former hostages and their relatives are still suffering from insufficient attention, care, warmth and communication from both the state and community members.

Former hostages need further attention, assistance or money to help deal with their medical problems. Some 120 people, including 80 children are learning how to live with severe physical disabilities. 25 of these children are orphans. 30 people with hearing problems need operations. According to Dr Karginov “Some of the former hostages need to be operated on for the second time, many need rehabilitation, however the state does not have enough funds to provide for this.” Bureaucratic procedures are often hard to overcome. Many of those who must go to school cannot move on their own. Fear of going to school or being alone at home, as well as separation anxiety, sleeping disorders, general anxiety and an unwillingness to rejoin normal community life remain prevalent among Beslanese. Experts predict that the situation may worsen.

Insufficient information from the state authorities regarding the criminal investigation of the September attack adds to tension in the community. A survey conducted in May and June by the Republican Institute of Social Research revealed that the population has very low trust in local and federal authorities.

## Operational developments

Apart from financial and humanitarian aid, 20 projects are planned for North Ossetia, of which 14 were operational in August. The projects include: psychologists from Moscow working with pre-school institutions; CARITAS supporting the work of psychologists at 3 schools; UNICEF and CAF (Charity Aid Foundation) organizing trainings and country camps for senior pupils and teachers; a centre of psychosocial support, called Doverie, in Vladikavkaz, supported by UNICEF; its affiliate in Beslan being funded by SDCA (Swiss Agency of Development and Cooperation) among others. Experts from Germany, Israel, France, Slovakia and Czech Republic have trained teachers and psychologists in Vladikavkaz/Beslan to help people deal with and overcome their trauma. However, none of these programmes has the out-reach potential of the Red Cross' visiting nurses service.

The Ministry of Education of North Ossetia has tried to coordinate psychological programmes in Beslan. However, social, medical and humanitarian support coming through the three ministries of North Ossetia (Education, Health and Social development) still suffer from a lack of coordination. Insufficient information about the assistance

brought about confusion and unnecessary irritation among the community. While senior students from school N1 had many trips abroad, most of the younger pupil aged 7-9 stayed at home all summer and did not receive any psychological rehabilitation. There were several reasons for this: children were scared to leave their parents; parents did not want to part with children; and there were few, if any, invitations for rehabilitation for both children and parents.

Stress disorders witnessed (and predicted) by local doctors, make psychological assistance especially important in the run up before the anniversary. During the days of mourning, the Russian Red Cross (RRC) community centre in Beslan will be closed. All staff – visiting nurses, social pedagogues and psychologists as well as some of their patients and trainees – will be involved in the memorial events. These will include the placing of wreaths and flowers and the standing in memorial at the cemetery and school. The Red Cross will put up several tents with medicaments, fresh water and chairs for rest at these two locations. Red Cross staff and volunteers will be on duty there between September 1 and 10. RRC visiting nurses have been on duty at the cemetery since August 20 helping people live through their grief again with a stretched out hand, a glass of water, medicines, a kind word or simply keeping silence together.

Together with Moscow University of Psychology, the RRC is active in organizing a competition of children drawings. The exhibition will be displayed in the Palace of Culture in September together with an art exhibition presented to Beslan by the Red Cross in Ivanovo. The best works will be awarded and they will travel around Russia.

### **Red Cross and Red Crescent action - objectives, progress, impact**

In November, the Russian Red Cross and the Federation revised the initial emergency appeal launched on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2004 in order to ensure that Red Cross intervention in relation to the crisis remained relevant and that its role was clearly defined. An additional objective was included in April, based on learning from the school tragedy as well as the Moscow hostage crisis in 2002.

According to a Russian Red Cross study, one-third of the 578 affected families in Beslan need ongoing home care and psychological support due to various psychological and health problems. They will need this support until the end of 2005, but according to Red Cross estimations this programme will be vital for Beslan for the next two years.

This need is being met by the Red Cross through the introduction of an outreach support programme provided by the Russian Red Cross where some 20 nurses visit affected families each week, providing psychological support and home care to those whose lives have been torn apart by the tragedy.

In addition the Russian Red Cross has opened a community centre in Beslan in the building of the local Palace of Culture. It provides psychosocial support for the affected population through social activities and home visits. Almost 400 people attend art, computer or sports classes in the centre. A quarter of them are former hostages. More people are attracted by family meetings and public events organized in the centre. Such a community-based approach proved to be more effective than occasional assistance of external specialists. Social activities, training, information, additional education and sports organized by the Red Cross Centre have had a healthy psychological effect on individuals and the community as a whole. During the day, the centre appears like a bee-hive and is highly appreciated by both the people and the authorities.

The Russian Red Cross role in this programme goes beyond the implementation of work within this international appeal. In September and October last year the Russian Red Cross raised significant funds in-country through a television appeal (over USD 3.5 million). More than half of this was spent on equipment for hospitals in Moscow, Vladikavkaz and Beslan where victims were treated. To improve facilities at the central Beslan hospital, equipment worth USD 250,000 was procured, so that more people could be treated locally. Financial support was provided to people who went to Moscow for medical treatment (USD700 each). Several people were funded to receive treatment overseas. USD 30,000 was spent for a rehabilitation trip of 75 people to the Czech Republic. In the meantime the RRC has decided to use remaining funds to support several individuals with medical treatment on a long term basis. North Ossetia Red Cross branch paid USD 56,000 for medical treatment for three children in Germany. It also funded an eye operation for a child in Krasnodar (USD 220). Eye treatment for one person in

Japan is also being considered. The planned RRC computer education at homes for children with disabilities is awaited in Beslan where internet access is limited and computer training is hard to obtain.

ICRC implements a range of programmes in nearby Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia and finds that there is a great need for psychosocial support in many places. Psychologists from Northern Caucasus involved in the population movement programme are also available to be involved in other activities carried out by the Red Cross.

### **Revised objectives and activities**

1. Address the emergency and long term needs of the affected population (as an auxiliary to existing interventions) through provision of a schools-based rehabilitation programme and establishment of a rehabilitation/community centre to support rehabilitation of the affected population and their return to work.
2. Establish a network of visiting nurses/social workers based at the North Ossetia RRC branch providing social, medical and psychological support to the affected population.
3. Strengthen the capacity of the local Russian Red Cross branch to provide social, medical and psychological support to the affected population, and prevent professional “burnout” among Russian Red Cross staff members and volunteers providing assistance to the affected population via professional support mechanisms.
4. Facilitate treatment and recovery of specific groups of the affected population in need of long term medical rehabilitation.
5. Provide informational support to project activities through creation of a regularly updated interactive internet portal within the existing Russian Red Cross website, through design, production and distribution of education and awareness materials, and cooperation with mass media on promotion of project activities.
6. Build the Russian Red Cross response capacity in case of future hostage crises, aimed at supporting relatives and community members around a hostage crisis site.

**Target beneficiary group:** Children and adults belonging to the following groups: hostages, their family members and friends; staff and volunteers working to support the victims; general population affected by the hostage crisis.

**Beneficiaries:** 5,000

### **Activities against objectives:**

**Objective 1:** *Address the emergency and long term needs of the affected population (as an auxiliary to existing interventions) through provision of a schools-based rehabilitation programme and establishment of a rehabilitation/community centre to support rehabilitation of the affected population and their return to work.*

The work at school has been postponed until the beginning of a new school year and new assessment of these needs. (Some of these needs at schools were covered by other organizations in 2004-2005) In the reported period most attention was concentrated on VNS and the Red Cross community centre of psycho-social support in Beslan.

#### **• A community/rehabilitation centre in Beslan – opened on May 15 2005**

The Red Cross Centre has become a base for activities designed to assist the local population to cope with the psychological impact of the hostage crisis. The centre is supervised by the Russian Red Cross in cooperation with the International Federation. Activities are oriented to prevent social problems and diffuse the psychological tension in the region that has increased since the school siege. 100 of 400 people attending the centre are former hostages.

The centre was officially opened on May 15, 2005. The event marked the Russian Red Cross (RRC) day and brought about 600 Beslanese together. The actual work of the centre started in April:

**20 visiting nurses** began the screening of the 578 families affected by the crisis to identify their needs in home care and psychological support. This type of home care was welcome in the families suffering from isolation and disrupted community ties.

By July, visiting nurses, in some cases together with psychologists, attended all the families, filled in some 1000 social passports and concluded that 200 families needed permanent home care and psychological support until the end of 2005.

100 people from these families began to attend clubs at the Red Cross centre, more than 200 of them participated in weekly family meetings, where they socialize, share their thoughts and concerns – very important in the Beslan atmosphere poisoned by scandals of distribution of humanitarian aid, privileges and alleged injustice.

**Six studios** work at the centre involving some 400 people (including 110 former hostages) in social activities (English language/International club, folk dance, sports, computer/internet club, digital photo studio). The children's playing room started its psycho therapeutic work in August. The Swedish Embassy in Moscow provided funds (collected in Moscow) for its equipment. The work in the studios is organized to permit rotation of the population, allowing more people to be involved in the social activities, increasing the psychological impact on the community.

**Four psychologists** are working in the centre. Between May and August they conducted 115 counselling sessions. The demand for this service grows. They also provide assistance and training for the VNS.

A few **social events** were organized by the Red Cross for the entire community (Last school day, International Children day, Meeting with Mothers of Beslan organisation, How we spent the summer)

The RRC Centre in Beslan is always full of people. The staff are friendly and receptive to their problems and requests.

Three **summer camps** for children were organized in June and July. Summer camp for children on 626 July brought together 60 children (9-14 years old) including 10 former hostages (many children from school N 1 are on trips abroad). The second shift started on August 4 and lasted for 20 days. In November a conference of all Red Cross camps for Beslan children is planned. The camps include one in Norway and one in Czech Republic and the conference is designed to learn the best aspects of each in terms of spreading RC ideas, friendship, knowledge from home and from abroad.

**Objective 2:** *Establish a network of visiting nurses/social workers based at the North Ossetia RRC branch providing social, medical and psychological support to the affected population.*

30 visiting nurses are now working within the programme of psycho-social rehabilitation, including 20 in Beslan. So far the programme concentrated on the activities in Beslan, involving others at the regular monthly knowledge sharing sessions.

Four professional psychologists from Vladikavkaz are based in the RRC Centre in Beslan to:

- provide psychological counseling for the population;
- provide professional supervision and advice for VNS;
- conduct activities that will reduce psychological stress, promote the ability to communicate, increase social competence, interaction and acceptance of others; and
- prevent professional burnout of RC staff.

**Objective 3:** *Strengthen the capacity of the local Russian Red Cross branch to provide social, medical and psychological support to the affected population, and prevent professional "burnout" among Russian Red Cross staff members and volunteers providing assistance to the affected population via professional support mechanisms.*

#### **Capacity building of the RRC branch in North Ossetia**

The RRC office in Vladikavkaz has been renovated (German Red Cross funds), enlarged and equipped with a new computer and a printer. It has five rooms, with one envisaged for a senior visiting nurse and a psychologist. So far the senior visiting nurse hired for the programme is based in Beslan and will be there until the end of 2005.

Negotiations were conducted with the head of local administration with regards to a Red Cross room in a newly-built school. The plan is to make it a room of social activities (puppet production and theatre) and eventually develop it into a multi-functional Red Cross room.

Through its various activities, the RRC Centre in Beslan attracts volunteers and promotes the RCRC ideas among the population. In autumn there will be a special event connected with the distribution of the RRC membership card.

### **Training in PSP for Russian Red Cross staff and volunteers**

Three workshops were conducted from May to July:

- on project planning in June to identify tasks and objectives of the RRC in Beslan for July-September (for all staff)
- on psychological aspects of the work with people in grief (for all staff)
- on principles and methods of work in children rehabilitation rooms (for psychologists)
- two workshops and regular consultations with a Federation consultant (for all staff)

Agreement on cooperation with the RRC on the Beslan programme and a MoU signed with the ICRC will allow the promotion of the programme to neighbouring republics once it is established in North Ossetia. The first such workshops may take place in October.

**Objective 4:** *Facilitate treatment and recovery of specific groups of the affected population in need of long term medical rehabilitation.*

- **Funding of long term medical treatment of victims of the school crisis in specialized clinics in Russia and abroad, on a case by case basis.**

In line with the original appeal, the Russian Red Cross and Federation are assessing needs and requests from beneficiaries and will support affected families with vouchers to sanatoriums (health spas) for rehabilitation and recuperation. The Russian Red Cross and Federation intend to make sure that all ex-hostages and their families are offered an opportunity to get the required treatment or rehabilitation.

Through its VNS, the Red Cross is developing its own database on aid received and on families in need of additional medical treatment. Some requests are being satisfied through the RRC funds. The RRC is developing a programme of long term support for individual patients in Beslan, rather than occasional support to various people.

This activity also anticipates a possibility of funding individual cases of medical treatments, including surgical interventions and provision of prosthetics in case they cannot be covered promptly by other organizations. By August it was clear that the need for further medical treatment and rehabilitation is high.

The funds from the programme will be used as soon as all applications are collected and plans of funding coordinated with the RRC.

**Objective 5:** *Provide informational support to project activities through creation of a regularly updated interactive internet portal within the existing Russian Red Cross website, through design, production and distribution of education and awareness materials, and cooperation with mass media on promotion of project activities.*

- **Creation of interactive portal at the RRC web-site (with remote administration) that will help to coordinate assistance to the victims of Beslan**

In June the official RRC web-site was finally approved as [www.redcross.ru](http://www.redcross.ru). A professional manager was hired for the Beslan programme coverage and they developed a new design for the site and prepared materials for it. So far, the input is all in Russian. The site is ready to be launched as soon as the RRC finishes negotiations with the provider regarding some technical capacities.

- **Production of information and training materials on psychosocial support.**

Information materials of basic psychological support are under development.

**Objective 6:** *Build a RRC hostage crisis response capacity in Moscow and the North Caucasus to support relatives and community members around a hostage crisis site.*

The RRC /Federation now propose to train staff and volunteers in Moscow and the North Caucasus to perform a defined role should such hostage crises happen again. The role would be based on the provision of first aid, tea and coffee, drinking water, plastic rain coats or blankets depending on the weather, biscuits, telephone links with loved ones, and psychological support. These services will be provided from a Red Cross marquee tent that would be erected immediately in the event of a crisis.

RRC branches in the North Caucasus and Moscow will be trained and equipped to provide such support during hostage crises and will have this role negotiated with the Ministry of Emergencies. The RRC Hostage Crisis response capacity could be used to assist victims of natural disasters also and this potential will be considered during training, which will start in October.

#### **Constraints so far**

- State authorities need to spread information more about former hostages' rights for medical treatment and rehabilitation makes the work of VNS more difficult, increases rumours and dissatisfaction of the population.
- Local medical authorities have clear evidence that the need for psychological support is growing and more people are applying for it, however they have no systemized information or proper analysis about people's psychological state
- In terms of the Red Cross psychologists, a possible shift from lecture work with the population, as planned before, to more individual counselling in the centre is envisaged
- VNs lack experience in organizing group work (family meetings) in the centre (training on group work will take place in September)
- The director of the centre is good at administration/presentation but needs to develop people management and team building skills.
- Difficult to find criteria to assess the psychological state of people, although the RRC has developed a social passport with certain criteria and the VN are gradually overcoming difficulties with filling it.
- Cooperation between RRC from Republic of Ingushetia and N. Ossetian Red Cross in terms of psychological support needs to be strengthened.

Despite to difficulties, progress is being made. The first monitoring trip in July revealed good results: the Red Cross is known, accepted, appreciated. As one boy said 'the Red Cross is being reborn in Beslan'. The rebirth started in September 2004 and is gathering pace with the RRC Centre activities.

#### **Cooperation and coordination**

A number of UN agencies and international organizations are operational in the North Caucasus, providing social and psychological support to the population exhausted by wars and forced migration. Coordination of these activities is done through OCHA (the UN organization for coordination of humanitarian aid) based in Nazran (Ingushetia). Programme updates are sent to OCHA regularly.

The Russian Red Cross and Federation are considering expanding psychological support to areas outside North Ossetia, primarily within the framework of training courses on PSS, and distribution of information materials on crisis situations. All activities will be in cooperation with the ICRC, which has extensive experience and good knowledge of the region. This work is to start in the near future.

The ICRC officers in Moscow and in Vladikavkaz are kept updated on the developments of the Federation/RRC programme in Beslan.

## Information and Representation

Media - Ossetian, Russian and International – are attracted by the Centre (ITAR-TASS, Interfax, BBC, AFP, Swiss FACTS, German radio have thus far been interested). Some 15 articles on RC work and ongoing issues of vulnerability in the Red Cross context have been published in the local media. There have also been five TV news programmes on the issue. Director of the RRC Centre in Beslan had meetings and gave interviews to various Russian and international media. Three stories were written for the International Federation web-site. A photo gallery for the RRC web-site (not launched yet) is ready. Video footage for a Video News release on the eve of one year Anniversary has been prepared.

In June the programme was presented at the Coordination Conference organized by the republican Ministry of Education. In August the RRC programme was presented and highly appreciated at a Conference on psychological issues in Beslan held by the Moscow Institute of Forensic Medicine that worked with various cases of psychological and psychiatric distresses of the affected population from Beslan in 2004-2005. In August the programme coordinators were invited to various meetings with the local authorities re: the RRC role in the memorial events of September.

## Conclusions

Active implementation of the RRC/International Federation programme in Beslan has proved to be effective and has been well received by the population. The Red Cross centre in Beslan presents a new model of a complex community centre of psychosocial support.

Its complex approach to psycho-social rehabilitation (home visits, social activities, training and information) helps to solve psychological problems in Beslan both in families and in the community. With its equipment and trained staff the Red Cross centre has a big potential for rehabilitation of the entire community for several years. It can also help to develop the humanitarian ideas of the Red Cross in the community and strengthen its position in the republic.

The local authorities, doctors, psychologists and people emphasize the centre's important features:

- community based approach,
- long-term in character,
- no cost for the population,
- new occupations for the Beslanese,
- not limited to former hostages, and
- not limited to Beslan population.

In 2005-2006 psychological work will be in demand due to the stress disorders caused by the crisis, physical disabilities, insufficient communication and disrupted family and community ties. It will take time to heal these wounds that might not always appear on the surface – problems stored up for the future are hard to predict. The affected population will need further care and attention in solving psychological and medical problems of people with serious emotional and physical injuries. It takes time for an individual to come to terms with pain, it will take more time to help a fiercely traditional Ossetian community in this crisis.

It is a big psychological project. The Red Cross needs to accumulate and keep information about this experience to be able to share it when necessary in future. It needs to accumulate and analyze this experience of a large scale complex long-term community based psychological support operation.