

INFORMATION BULLETIN



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

ALBANIA: HEAVY SNOWFALLS

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Summary/Update: With recent improvements in weather conditions, the crisis in the north has eased somewhat. Nevertheless, many remote villages remain completely cut-off, and they are now the focus of Red Cross activities. The Albanian Red Cross (ARC), together with the Albanian government, has reacted effectively to this emergency. Since the first Information Bulletin, partner national societies in close collaboration with the ARC and the World Food Programme (WFP) have conducted an emergency assessment. Their findings and recommendations are reported below.

The Situation

Facing its worst winter weather in fifteen years, northern Albania has found itself in a precarious situation. Many roads have been completely blocked by heavy snow, remote villages remain cut-off and isolated from food supplies and medical care, and problems persist with the electricity and water supplies. To date, the media have reported five deaths.

The Prime Minister declared a fifteen day state of emergency commencing 7 January 2002. An Inter-Ministerial Committee of Civil Emergency was formed to develop and implement a response to this disaster. Various agencies have now pledged over 580 metric tons of wheat flour (a 30-day ration), a commodity already identified as being in great demand. The Albanian Red Cross (ARC), the Albanian Army, and KFOR have already distributed 140 metric tons of aid. Still, some *Komuna* (commune) centres and their surrounding villages have not received any assistance at all. Every effort needs to be made to ensure that assistance reaches these populations that are in desperate need.

Most of the primary national roads that were initially completely blocked are now open. This is also the case with the majority of roads leading to *Komuna* (commune) centres. However a number of villages cannot be accessed from these centres, while other communities remain completely inaccessible by road. The four prefectures affected have a population of 144,000. In order to clarify the populations of affected people and identify their emergency needs, an assessment was organized.



Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The ARC and partner national societies present in the country organized an emergency assessment from 12 to the 15 January in the northern districts affected (Shkoder, Malesi e Madhe, Lezhe, Kukes, Has, Diber, Bulqize and Burrel). The assessment involved three teams consisting of representatives from the ARC, the American Red Cross, and WFP. A standardized questionnaire was developed covering areas such as the history of events, areas blocked, agencies involved in operations and people's needs. The teams met with local branches of the ARC as well as with prefectural and municipal authorities and health officials. They also interviewed ordinary citizens knowledgeable about the situation, including marketers, minibus drivers and the media. The findings from these assessments are detailed in the box below.

Findings of the Joint Assessment Teams

Transport: Some food aid has already been transported to local warehouses. However the follow-on transport to communities in need has been delayed due to lack of vehicles, lack of communication and lack of financial and logistical resources.

Infrastructure: There has been some structural damage to key electrical and water facilities. In general the entire population of the north has only 1 to 5 hours of electricity per day.

Medical Needs: The media have reported five cases of individuals freezing to death. The primary health concerns identified are: lack of medical services and medicines, particularly in those villages that have little or no road access. Medicines identified as being in crucial need include antibiotics, cough syrups, baby foods and baby medicines. Another health concern is that people have a lack of access to soap and detergents.

Food Needs: For those villages that remain cut off from their *Komuna* centres, or have no open road access, there is a need for staple foods (wheat flour to make bread). For those isolated in villages for thirty days or more, it is likely that many have now depleted their household reserves and are in nutritional deficit.

Other Needs: There is a remaining need for winter clothing, particularly for children and the elderly.

Information: There is a lack of Red Cross and NGO presence at current government/municipal/*Komuna* distribution sites. This means that it is difficult to determine if aid has actually reached isolated people in need. In many remote villages, the only two-way communication is through local police radio. However, without electricity to charge batteries, most of these radios have now ceased to be effective.



Recommendations:

Based on the findings, following are the recommendations for the Red Cross Movement and co-operating agencies:

- **Beneficiaries:** The initial assessment planned to target 55 000 beneficiaries, but the situation has since changed. With improving weather conditions, the latest assessment has identified three districts in the prefecture of Kukes as being the most in need. Forty one isolated villages, with over four thousand families will be the beneficiaries of this action (a total of 20 630 individuals).
- **Food Aid:** Each family will receive two food parcels and 30 kilograms of wheat flour. The total amount of food donated should exceed the current need; however it is essential that there is appropriate co-ordination to ensure that these food resources reach the vulnerable people in isolated villages.
- **Logistics Planning:** Requests are being made to the Ministry of Defence and KFOR for additional helicopter aid flights to targeted villages, as well as for further assessments of isolated villages.

An operational team has been sent to the field to prepare a distribution plan, together with the local Kukës Red Cross branch. Red Cross trucks have already set off for Kukës. There will be a positioning of emergency supplies to ARC local branches for immediate village distribution via vehicle transport to the *Komuna* centres and by pack animal convoy. The German and American Red Cross are supporting the ARC by covering some of the transportation needs.

There will also be complete and accurate use of beneficiary registration and monitoring at distribution locations to ensure proper procedures are followed, that there are equal distributions, and fair assessments of vulnerable villages within communes.



Conclusions

Close co-ordination between partner national societies and the ARC has resulted in an efficient response to this emergency. A detailed emergency assessment was carried out, with concrete recommendations and a clearly defined plan of action. All of this has been achieved together with the Albanian government as well as with other NGO's in the country.

Assessments will continue to take place, and additional information will be released as it is available. A Federation delegate recently appointed to the region (based in Macedonia) will begin making regular visits to Albania shortly.

For a full description of the National Society profile, see www.ifrc.org

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<u>List of Contributions</u>	
<u>Donor Name</u>	<u>Aid Provided</u>
Bulgarian Red Cross with support from American RC	80 metric tons of wheat flour plus 10 000 food parcels
Austrian Red Cross	60 metric tons of wheat flour
Canadian Embassy	20 000 USD
Spanish Red Cross	10 000 USD
World Food Programme	350 metric tons of wheat flour
Caritas	wheat flour
* The Albanian Red Cross also made available 200 metric tons of wheat flour from its own relief emergency stock.	

For longer-term programmes, please refer to the Federation's Annual Appeal.

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