

WESTERN UKRAINE: FLOODS

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The Disaster

The floods which occurred in the Western Ukraine on 5-6 November, 1998 claimed the lives of 17 people, and were considered the worst in this century. Several days of above-normal rainfall caused flooding of the Tysa, Borzhava, Latorytsia and Uzh Rivers, inundating 172 towns and villages. The floods were heaviest in the districts of Tyachiv, Rahiv, Mizhgirrya and Mukachevo, causing damage estimated at some 513 million hrivna (CHF equivalent). A total of 2,135 cases of tuberculosis have been confirmed since the floods, 50% of whom are children with the remainder between the age of 20-30.

The Ukrainian Government and the local authorities in the region have begun the reconstruction of houses, roads, bridges, and dams destroyed by the floods. 1,347 houses remain destroyed, with another 1,498 in a dangerously unstable condition. Of the 24,340 people who were evacuated from their houses after the floods, the vast majority have returned to their homes. Some 10,058 victims however remain homeless and have been accommodated in schools and kindergartens, or with relatives. Despite the hardship, many people have chosen to remain in their partially destroyed houses. On 4 January, 1999, a small earthquake occurred in Zakarpattya, increasing the damage to those houses already affected by the floods, and destroying another 7 dwellings. The flood and earthquake has also prompted several landslides in the region.

The affects of the natural disaster have been exacerbated by the dire economic situation in the region, with 92-95% of the total population of 1,279,670 living in poverty (according to official Government statistics). There is very little hope of any real improvement in the economic conditions in the near future.

Red Cross/Red Crescent Action

The Ukrainian Red Cross Society (URCS) and the Federation, with support from the National Guard of Ukraine and the army, have been heavily involved in the relief operations from the initial days of the disaster, conducting two needs assessment missions, meeting with local authorities, as well as the Minister of Emergency Situations, and the Deputy Ministers of Health and Finance. Relief items were delivered to the beneficiaries during the first days after the disaster by means of 3 heavy transport helicopters made available by the Ministry of Emergency Situations.

The response from the donor community was immediate, allowing the provision of food parcels, hygiene

- ◆ the Italian Government responded with immediate financial support to procure and transport relief items;
- ◆ the German Government provided a contribution of CHF 280,000 for hygiene kits, packing materials, transport, and warehousing;
- ◆ the Dutch Red Cross carried out local purchases of food and hygiene parcels;
- ◆ the British Red Cross provided USD 37,500 in cash, as well as winter footwear
- ◆ the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) provided CAD 75,000 in cash;
- ◆ the Danish Red Cross provided DKK 15,000 in cash and an in-kind contribution of second hand clothes;
- ◆ the Swiss and Danish Red cross provided an in-kind contribution of sleeping bags, blankets, and second hand clothes;
- ◆ the Netherlands Red Cross provided USD 122,525 in cash;
- ◆ the Spanish Red Cross provided a contribution used for the procurement of various relief items.

The total assistance provided to the flood victims through the URCS amounts to UAH 4 million (CHF 1.6 million), including cash donations of half a million hryvna (approximately CHF 204,000) from other Red Cross organisations, enterprises, organisations, and individuals within the country.

An application for ECU 400,000 seeking to cover the remaining medical and health needs was submitted to ECHO by the German Red Cross. A decision is pending.

The response and performance of the URCS has been very effective, with distributions carried out quickly. The capacity of the URCS has also been strengthened in the process.

Needs

The immediate emergency needs are covered, but because relief operations in Zakarpattya will continue throughout the winter months there remains a demand for reconstruction material, food aid, medical supplies, and water purification systems. Cold weather, adverse living conditions, and polluted water have resulted in an increasing number of people seeking medical treatment. Infectious diseases are also increasing, and the URCS will continue to respond by supporting the victims of the floods (with support provided both by the Federation and from bilateral donors) throughout the winter.

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