

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

ARGENTINA: SOCIAL CRISIS

25 November 2002

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 178 countries. For more information: www.ifrc.org

Appeal No. 08/2002

Launched on 10 April 2002 for CHF 1,824,000 for four months for 52,000 beneficiaries

Operations Update No. 2

Period covered: 7 May - 31 October 2002

Last Update issued 2 July 2002

IN BRIEF

Appeal coverage: 18.9%

Related Appeals: 01.22/2002 South America

Outstanding needs: CHF 1,478,793

Summary: The precarious situation in Argentina continues to worsen as 10,313 people fall into poverty on a daily basis. Statistics confirm that over 53% of Argentines now live below the poverty line, and that there is an unemployment rate of over 25%. The Argentine Red Cross (ARC) has begun implementation of its programme to provide food rations to community soup kitchens in senior citizens' homes and in schools. To date, over 15,000 beneficiaries have been reached through the efforts of the Argentine Red Cross and partner Red Cross Societies. Further funding is urgently required in order to complete the programme successfully in support of 52,000 beneficiaries for whom both nutritional requirements and basic health care are increasingly inaccessible. It is critical that donors respond in the face of the growing severity of the situation, the worst social and economic crisis that Argentina has confronted for thirteen years.

Operational Developments w

The social situation in Argentina has deteriorated dramatically in recent years and health and education services have been eroded. The current situation has left communities which for years have suffered from high levels of poverty, with no access to minimum food requirements and basic health services. Since the start of the economic crisis, Argentines have seen their pensions disappear, unemployment soar, inflation skyrocket and industries decimated.

According to the latest official figures from the National Institute for Statistics and Surveys (INDEC), the situation in May 2002 was as follows:

- 20 million people, or 53% of the country's population, live below the poverty line;
- 9 million of these persons do not have sufficient financial resources to satisfy their daily nutritional needs;
- 4 million people under 14 years of age do not have access to their basic daily nutritional requirements. This population suffers from varying degrees of malnutrition as well as increased susceptibility to illness;
- In the last 12 months, 6.15 million people joined the ever increasing "new poor". This is a consequence of increasing unemployment and depreciation of salaries due to inflation and devaluation of the currency which took place at the beginning of 2002;
- 7 out of 10 children are born into poor homes. Of these seven, four are born into homes in which families are not able to meet basic nutritional needs.
- 20 per cent of children are under-nourished. The centre for child nutrition studies, working for WHO/PAHO recently declared that, while child malnutrition was between 11% and 17% last year, this rate has increased dramatically in 2002.

Since May 2002, the situation has deteriorated despite major efforts by the government to support families financially through a monthly subsidy. More than 1.8 million people have benefited through this programme. Furthermore, crime has increased dramatically, principally in the form of kidnappings and "express" and "virtual" kidnappings, which have created an alarming sense of insecurity among the population. At the end of its recent visit, the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights warned that uncertainty and the climate of fear among the Argentine population could seriously jeopardize the national elections scheduled to be held at the beginning of 2003.

Recent nutritional figures show that Argentines are eating 38% less pork, 29% less chicken, 20% less of dairy products, 7% less eggs and 1,1% less beef when compared with statistics from last year. This is not the result of changing dietary habits among the population, but rather a 40% drop in people's purchasing power given salary freezes and an inflation rate of 37% during the first seven months of the year. In the case of basic food items, inflation was 67%. Brand name products have been abandoned in favour of cheaper alternatives. Sales of shoes, clothing and books have plummeted and city centres are full of locked up stores. Sales at supermarkets and malls have fallen drastically and customers are returning to local grocery stores where shopkeepers still sell on credit.

Despite recent government statements that indicators are positive and the five year recession is over, there have been 13,685 public protests during the last 8 months. On a daily basis, roads and access to main towns are blocked by groups of protesters. Despite the fact that almost 100 bankrupt businesses were taken over by their own laid off employees, unemployment in the provinces remains at over 26% according to the latest official figures released in May. The problem is further complicated in that 47.5% of employed people are working without minimal benefits such as social insurance and 22% are underemployed. The economic turndown is clearly visible given that 12.2% of the entire workforce are working in domestic labour, while only 8.9% are employed by the traditionally strong construction sector.

Coordination w

Participating ARC branch representatives, Federation delegates and representatives from the headquarters attended a coordination meeting in Buenos Aires on 2, 3 and 4 August. A detailed evaluation of the implementation of the operation and of the appeal status was carried out. In addition, the ARC participates in ongoing inter-institutional coordination meetings with NGOs including CARITAS, MSF, together with the Civil Defence.

Red Cross and Red Crescent action w

The operation focuses on the delivery of food and the provision of health and support services over a four month period to beneficiary populations located in some of the most vulnerable areas of Argentina. Beneficiaries include:

- Senior citizens in day centres, old people's homes or living on their own without any resources.
- Children and young people in orphanages, community centres and schools. In some cases, this also includes support to families.
- Families living in extreme poverty in vulnerable communities identified by the branches of the Argentine Red Cross.

To date, the response to the appeal has been low, with a current coverage of only 18.9%. However, the Argentine Red Cross has also received bilateral contributions from the German Red Cross and Spanish Red Cross Societies, together with private bilateral donations. In addition, the National Society is mobilizing local resources as well as the limited, but very welcome, donations received through the appeal.

As a result of the low appeal response, the Argentine Red Cross changed its strategy. To date, major distributions have been carried out using bilateral and local support, while appeal funds are being used to complement these distributions in the poorest and hardest hit communities of the country, such as Tucuman.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Society w

The ARC is implementing a capacity building programme supported by the Federation's capacity building fund (CBF) which includes strengthening of both headquarters and branches and the improvement of communications and procedures. In this context, new financial procedures in the Argentine Red Cross are being implemented. In addition, a new purchasing system has been tested several times since the crisis began and has proven flexible and transparent. These new tools were developed with the support of the regional delegation and are being put into practice during the implementation of the social crisis operation.

A revised organization chart of the National Society headquarters has been drawn up. Structures are being strengthened and staff teams consolidated.. A local staff member was hired to work on the implementation of the projects making up the appeal. There are two open positions for the management of the recently approved bilateral projects with the Spanish International Cooperation Agency (AECI). A third position has been opened in order to strengthen the development of the portfolio of projects within the recently set up project office.

An evaluation meeting during the first phase of the relief operation was carried out with the participation of the local volunteer technical coordinators, as well as the Presidents of several branches. Local reports on the implementation of this first phase were received and the consolidated report will be available shortly.

Objectives, activities and results w

Food Assistance w

Objective 1: To provide food assistance to senior citizens, children and families living in extreme poverty.

Mechanisms such as the Argentine Red Cross Food Bank have been activated. Several local offices of international food companies have been contacted and food donations are being received and channelled through this bank. In total, more than 2,000 families - over 10,000 people - have received a two week supply of food

items such as soya milk, rice or pasta. These items are distributed through soup kitchens, schools and six branches of the National Society. A campaign involving the three largest associations of young lawyers in Buenos Aires is being implemented to collect food items and to reinforce the distribution capacity of the bank, as well as specifically to support the struggling community-based soup-kitchen in Santos Lugares, one of the poorest neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires.

Private bilateral donations have been received, such as a container of food and clothes from an Argentine association in the United States. These items were distributed in three soup kitchens in Vicente Lopez, a neighbourhood located in the greater Buenos Aires area. Another container of over 10,000 canned goods is being sent from Spain.

The Spanish Red Cross has assisted 2,285 children and 1,401 senior citizens with food parcels. A second phase of the Spanish Red Cross operation began in early November thanks to a donation from the Spanish International Cooperation Agency through the Spanish Red Cross. This second phase is to provide food assistance to 9,805 children and 1,779 senior citizens in several provinces and will be carried out through Red Cross branches, soup kitchens, community-based associations for the elderly and shelters in nine of the most affected provinces of the country. These include Buenos Aires and provinces close to the River Plate basin and in the north of the country. Among the 1,779 elderly assisted, there are 344 people who have no access to services as many institutions have been forced to close because of the crisis. These people will be helped through door to door assistance.

With funding channelled through the appeal (see the attached contributions list), a food assistance and basic-health programme benefiting 2,620 children per month in 19 community-based soup kitchens is being implemented in the Tucuman Province. Food is to be provided for a three month period and the first phase of the distribution of food has been completed; local reports are due in November and consolidated figures are expected to be available soon after.

Health and Support Services w

Objective 1: To support primary health care services and health promotion programmes.

The Argentine Red Cross, in a joint-venture with CARITAS Argentina, is monitoring a major medical drugs distribution programme carried out by the Ministry of Health designed to strengthen community-based health centres. This multi-million dollar programme is being coordinated through the Inter-American Bank.

With support from the German Red Cross, two major hospitals in Catamarca, one of the poorest provinces in the country, have received hospital supplies and medicines.

Further vital health projects, as outlined in the appeal, will be implemented should further funding be received. Donors are urged to contribute to this section of the appeal which envisages support primary health care activities, together with psychological support, recreational activities and provision of basic school materials.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement -- Principles and Initiatives w

- *The Federation is responding to the significant needs of the most vulnerable in Argentina, which until recently, have received little media attention.*
- *Relief projects are designed to meet the needs of different categories of the vulnerable population including children and the elderly.*

National Society Capacity Building w

Previously appointed project “monitors” have now become zonal Red Cross technicians. There are currently four such technicians at the Argentine Red Cross; two are working at the headquarters and two with branches in the provinces and are responsible for the coordination of project activities.

The newly-formed Initial Intervention Unit within the ARC is now functioning. In time, this unit will form part of the national intervention team (NIT) system which the Federation is implementing throughout the Americas.

Federation Delegation w

The regional delegation for South America based in Buenos Aires seconded a member of staff to support the Argentine Red Cross in the implementation of the social crisis operation. He has actively supported the Argentine Red Cross throughout the planning process for the appeal, providing advice on the development of relevant systems, structures and procedures. As of early November, given the implementation of the Secretariat's change process and the new structure of support for South America, the regional delegation based in Lima and the sub regional office in Buenos Aires are continuing provision of support to the Argentine Red Cross.

Advocacy/Public Information w

Given the growing severity of the situation in Argentina, and the increasing numbers of people who are joining the ranks of the poor, there is currently greater media interest focused on Argentina's social crisis. The Federation has published articles on the social crisis, in particular through the October edition of the Federation's magazine, *Noticias de América Latina*, and is planning to boost provision of quality information for posting on both the Latin American and Federation web sites.

Outstanding needs w

As mentioned above, the situation in Argentina continues to deteriorate and the number of people severely affected increases daily, as do their needs. The Argentine Red Cross, with support from the German Red Cross, the Spanish Red Cross and the Federation delegation is working hard to help meet the needs of the most vulnerable in the country. However, significantly more funding is required in order to address needs for food and, in particular, health services and to complete the projects outlined in the appeal. It is critical that donors respond in the face of the hardship currently experienced by a large percentage of the Argentine population who are facing the worst social, economic and political crisis that Argentina has confronted since the return of democracy thirteen years ago.

For further details please contact: Luis Luna, Desk Officer for South America Phone : 41 22 730 42 74; Fax: 41 22 733 03 95; email: luna@ifrc.org

All International Federation Operations seek to adhere to the Code of Conduct and are committed to the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (SPHERE Project) in delivering assistance to the most vulnerable.

This operation seeks to administer to the immediate requirements of the victims of this disaster. Subsequent operations to promote sustainable development or longer-term capacity building will require additional support, and these programmes are outlined on the Federation's website.

For further information concerning Federation operations in this or other countries, please access the Federation website at <http://www.ifrc.org>.

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Argentina social crisis						ANNEX 1
APPEAL No. 08/2002		PLEDGES RECEIVED			25.11.2002	
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
CASH						
REQUESTED IN APPEAL CHF ----->				1'824'000		TOTAL COVERAGE 18.9%
BRITISH - RC		10'000	GBP	22'962	13.09.2002	SOUP KITCHEN
CHILEAN - RC		500	USD	806	03.05.2002	DIRECT TO DELEGATION
FINNISH - RC		33'000	EUR	48'388	14.05.2002	
JAPANESE - RC		36'300	USD	53'506	14.08.2002	
SPAIN - RC		71'860	USD	104'916	19.06.2002	DIRECT CONTRIBUTION
SWEDISH - GOVT		292'000	SEK	47'129	16.10.2002	
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN CASH				277'707	CHF	15.2%
KIND AND SERVICES (INCLUDING PERSONNEL)						
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
GERMANY	MEDICAL	45'000	USD	67'500	29.07.2002	BILATERAL - COMMUNITY HEALTH
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED IN KIND/SERVICES				67'500	CHF	3.7%
ADDITIONAL TO APPEAL BUDGET						
DONOR	CATEGORY	QUANTITY	UNIT	VALUE CHF	DATE	COMMENT
GERMANY	HOSPITAL ITEMS	103'774	USD	155'661	29.07.2002	BILATERAL
SUB/TOTAL RECEIVED				155'661	CHF	