

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

7 October 2004

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. 2; Period covered: 8th September to 5th October 2004. Appeal coverage: 158.9 %; ([click here to go directly to the Contributions List](#)).

Appeal history:

- Launched on 6th September for CHF 864,844 (USD 683,650 or EUR 556,750) for 12 months to assist 2000 beneficiaries.
- Disaster Relief Emergency Funds (DREF) allocated: CHF 50,000.

Related Emergency or Annual Appeals: Russia: Hostage Crisis in Beslan, North Ossetia Emergency Appeal. ([Please click here to go directly to the Emergency Appeal](#))

Operational Summary: The International Federation and Russian Red Cross are in the process of developing an action plan to meet longer term needs as outlined in the appeal launched on 6th September. To ensure the appeal funds are utilised in the most effective way to support the people of Beslan, a psychosocial delegate has joined the Federation delegation in Russia and already conducted a preliminary survey (26th -30th September 2004) of the actual and expected psychosocial needs in Beslan.

For further information specifically related to this operation please contact:

- *Russian Red Cross: Phone 7 095 126 5731; Fax 7 095 230 2868; email mail@redcross.ru*
- *Russia Delegation: Phone 7 095 937 5267; Fax 7 095 937 5263; email Moscow@ifrc.org*
- *Miro Modrusan, Desk officer, Secretariat. Phone 41 22 730 4324; Fax 41 22 733 0395; email miro.modrusan@ifrc.org*

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Background

Russia is in mourning for over 300 people killed during a siege on a school in Beslan, a town in the Southern Republic of North Ossetia. On 1st September, masked armed fighters stormed the school taking over 1200 children, their relatives and teachers hostage. Family relatives had been at the school celebrating the first day of the new term when the hostage takers took over at approximately 9.30am local time.

The siege ended in carnage on 3rd September, when bombs rigged up inside the school exploded, collapsing part of a roof in the gym where most of the children and women were held. Russian Special Forces moved in and fierce fighting broke out. During the chaos that followed, anxious relatives rushed forward to help the fleeing hostages who had been held for two days without food or water. The local hospital admitted 599 injured people in just three hours.

Operational developments



School no. 1 in Beslan is filled with flowers, bottles of water, toys, candles and sweets. A memorial will be built on the site in memory of the victims of the hostage crisis.

As of 29th September, approximately 240 people are still being treated in hospitals in Beslan, nearby Vladikavkaz and Moscow. Up to 60 bodies are still unidentified and a further 100-120 people reported missing. DNA testing is being used to identify bodies still lying in the morgues – on 30th September, funerals were held for 23 people whose remains were identified by DNA testing at Rostov; funerals continue to take place almost daily in Beslan. North Ossetia local authorities have established a legal committee to investigate the issue of missing persons.

In addition to the physical wounds received, the local population – ex-hostages, their friends and relatives - and the whole population of Beslan and North Ossetia is experiencing huge psychological trauma. There is particular concern and widespread fear in the region that revenge and retaliation are imminent following the traditional mourning period of 40 days.

Public support to the people of Beslan has been overwhelming. Among other support offered are places at boarding school and funded further education (university) for children orphaned as a result of the tragedy; free transport to and accommodation at holiday resorts on the Black Sea; and bank accounts established for each ex-hostage. Money and support has poured in from national and international organizations, governments and private donors; four teachers have set up a website detailing activities and support to people in Beslan at www.beslan.ru.

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

The International Federation and Russian Red Cross are in the process of developing an action plan to meet longer term needs as outlined in the appeal launched on 6th September. (For the whole text of the Emergency Appeal, please go to the web site at http://www.ifrc.org/cgi/pdf_appeals.pl?04/1904.pdf.)

To ensure the appeal funds are utilised in the most effective way to support the people of Beslan, a psychosocial delegate has joined the Federation delegation in Russia and already conducted a preliminary survey (26th -30th September 2004) of the actual and expected psychosocial needs in Beslan. The relevance of the emergency appeal with regards to these needs has also been assessed.

Following extensive interviews with local and international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), United Nations organisations and government officials in Beslan, the Federation and Russian Red Cross now have a more concrete idea of the needs, the support programmes already operating in the region to meet those needs and the potential for Red Cross support.

Psychological and psychosocial needs:

Psychologists working in Beslan predict the need for extensive psychological and psychosocial support in Beslan and across the North Caucasus region - both in the short and long term. The reaction to the hostage crisis is very individual, but psychological problems include fear of going to school, fear of being alone at home, nightmares, sleeping disorders, and general anxiety. The number of people seeking psychological support is expected to increase once the traditional 40 days of mourning after a funeral have passed, and local media has been advising people to seek psychological assistance at this time. Russian Red Cross and the Federation are particularly concerned with how to target the male population – very few men are coming for individual psychological support since this is not a socially accepted behaviour in the region.



Borik, 7, went to school for the first time on 1st September with his aunt, mother and father. He lost both parents in the siege. He doesn't want to go to school any more. Now a psychologist from Moscow is helping him and his aunt come to terms with their loss. She recommends that the tragedy should not be concealed from children.

At present, the following support is being provided to ex-hostages, their families and friends:

Serpskiy Institute, a Federal Centre for disaster psychology: Teams of 15-16 psychologists are working with people in Beslan, at clinics, at hospital and in homes, on a rotational basis (there is a staff changeover every 2 weeks). The psychologists are also running a 24 hour telephone hotline and carrying out psychological training for the overworked medical staff in Beslan hospital. Psychologists will remain in Beslan for a minimum of 6 months, until sufficient resources are in place to take over. The psychologists have also referred 12 children – accompanied by family members – to the Serpskiy Institute in Moscow for inpatient treatment; they will be discharged and another 11 children are due to arrive at the Institute in the coming week. A further 5 people affected by the hostage crisis have travelled to Moscow to seek out patient support from the Institute. The Institute in Moscow expects to continue to receive patients from Beslan for many months to come.

Beslan hospital: A video link has been established at Beslan hospital, allowing wounded people to receive consultations from State specialist doctors based in Moscow, without having to travel. The chief doctor of Beslan hospital is also the head of the local Red Cross branch.

TRUST, centre for psychological and pedagogical help: This is a well established centre in North Ossetia which works in cooperation with the Ministry of Emergencies and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and has been providing psychological support to

the local population for several years. Following the Beslan hostage crisis, its existing services (including a telephone hotline) were advertised extensively in local newspapers.

Beslan local authorities: The local government has printed and distributed 8,000 copies of a free newspaper “Voice of Beslan” which, among other information provided to the public, gives professional advice on how to cope with traumatic stress and where to go for support. Local television programmes are encouraging children to return to school and the Ministry of Education has discussed school-based psychological programmes initiative.

Sanatorium (health spas): Up to 500 ex-hostages and their family members are in a sanatorium (health spa) on the Black Sea, where they will stay for up to 21 days. Psychologists (including a psychologist working part time with International Committee of the Red Cross programmes in North Caucasus) are also at the sanatorium to

support psychological rehabilitation of the sanatorium residents. It has been recommended that the heavily overworked and exhausted hospital staff also have a retreat at the Black Sea.

There are numerous plans for construction of *rehabilitation centres* in the region. The **Swiss government**, working in cooperation with the Russian Federation Ministry of Health, plans to fund construction of a psychosocial rehabilitation centre in Beslan. The **Russian Federation government** has indicated that it will build a new rehabilitation centre, a hospital, two schools and 1-2 apartment blocks in Beslan. The Ministry of Health in North Ossetia has plans to establish a rehabilitation centre in Vladikavkaz, and **United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)**, **World Health Organisation (WHO)** and **Danish Refugee Council** intends to refurbish an old nursing school into a rehabilitation centre. These operations are being coordinated through once monthly meetings in Nazran.



Beslan's cemetery now holds many new graves. Another 23 funerals took place on 30th September after DNA tests positively identified some of those 60 bodies still lying in hospital morgues.

Recommendations: The Federation and Russian Red Cross are keen to stress the importance of meeting the needs of the people of Beslan in the short and long term. Continued cooperation and coordination with International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and other organizations working in the region is crucial to ensure minimum overlapping of support programmes.

The Federation and Russian Red Cross are assessing the possibility of implementing a long term schools-based psychological support programme. This would involve teachers being trained by professional psychologists on how to conduct activities to reduce psychological stress, promote ability to communicate, increase social competence, interaction and acceptance of others. These activities, conducted by the trained teachers, would be incorporated within the existing school curriculum and conducted on a weekly basis throughout the school year. At the same time, teachers would carry out similar activities with students' parents, on a twice monthly

basis. The teachers themselves would also benefit from the programme through participating in the training course and having access to psychologists. Professional psychological consultants would be available for back up, support and advice throughout the programme implementation period. The programme would be run with cooperation from the Russian Federation Ministries of Health and Education, and other organisations working in similar fields.

At present, the Federation and Russian Red Cross are also discussing the potential for creating and distributing leaflets on post traumatic stress management, normal reactions to abnormal events and coping mechanisms, targeting men, women and children. There is also scope for involvement in providing psychological support to staff of the hospital and the local Red Cross office, who are extremely overworked and at risk of psychological "burnout" - the local Red Cross branch has only four staff members, who are managing distribution of huge amounts of cash and in kind donations that have been flooding into Red Cross offices since the beginning of the siege; hospital staff have been working long hours under extreme pressure since the siege began over a month ago. Possible support includes funding trips to retreats/ health spas, and the secondment of a Red Cross psychologist to the local Red Cross branch.

Russian Red Cross and the Federation are especially keen to extend psychological support programmes to reach the male population and discussions are underway on the best means of providing this support.

The Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement is also aware of the regionwide impact of the Beslan school crisis and is exploring the possibility of expanding future support programmes to the rest of the Northern Caucasus. One potential method of increasing Red Cross capacity to respond in times of psychological trauma will be the translation and printing of the Federation "*Community based psychological support: a training manual*". This manual is the basis for a training course for volunteers which teaches basic information on psychological support,

what it is, how to best provide it in different circumstances. It already exists in English and Spanish and is presently being translated into French, Arabic and Farsi. The training course has been used successfully in many countries worldwide, including Iraq, where Red Cross volunteers who have participated on the course now have the knowledge and skills to provide more effective, community based psychological support to the local population. There is also a discussion regarding inclusion of separate cultural-specific modules for the Russian Federation.

Russian Red Cross:

Outside the appeal, Russian Red Cross has collected over USD 3,500,000. A commission has been established to regulate how this money is spent. Russian Red Cross headquarters has ensured that the entire amount will be distributed to the families of ex-hostages and of Emercom (Russian Federation Ministry of Emergencies) workers and Special Forces who lost their lives during the school siege.

The process of distributing money direct to the families has already begun – on 28th September the Russian Red Cross in Beslan delivered money to homes in Beslan, and on 29th September Moscow based staff distributed money to ex-hostages and their families currently in hospitals in Moscow. A local commission in Beslan, composed of Russian Red Cross staff, representatives from the Ministry of Health, and republican Committees of Women, Trade Unions and Veterans, compiled lists of beneficiaries from the three lists provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Health and Beslan local authorities. The Russian Red Cross staff and volunteers delivering the money to families spend significant time talking with the families, verifying their situation and how they have been affected by the school hostage crisis.

Russian Red Cross also received huge quantities of donations-in-kind – toys, games, electronic equipment (including computers, televisions, videoplayers), mattresses and bed linen, clothes, food items etc. Some items were distributed to victims of Beslan and their families admitted to hospitals in Moscow. The remainder has been sent to Beslan with assistance from the Ministry of Emergencies. Russian Red Cross and the Federation have also received numerous messages of condolences from individuals, organisations and schools across the world, which they are forwarding to Beslan.

For more information on Russian Red Cross activities please go to the Russian Red Cross website at www.red-cross.ru

**Information and Communication:**

The profile of the Russian Red Cross has been significantly raised, both nationally and internationally, thanks to media coverage of their support to victims of the Beslan hostage crisis. In recent weeks, President Bush of USA has praised the Red Cross for its humanitarian actions in Beslan, and articles on Russian Red Cross and the Movement have appeared in Russian Newsweek, in the Moscow Times, and numerous other publications (including the Federation website www.ifrc.org).

The Federation delegation in Moscow has produced a short film documenting Russian Red Cross activities (collection, transport and distribution of donations). A link to this video will be available shortly on the Russian Red Cross website www.red-cross.ru

[Please click here to return to the title page](#)

Goods donated to the Red Cross have been flown down to Beslan with the support of the Russian Federation Ministry of Emergencies