

# ***BELARUS, RUSSIAN FEDERATION, MOLDOVA, UKRAINE : WINTER EMERGENCY***

26 March 1998

*appeal no. 15/97*

*situation report no. 3*

*period covered: 1 January - 15 March*

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*Distributions of food parcels and winter clothing have been carried out in all four countries and soup kitchens set up to provide daily hot meals. Beneficiaries are homeless, handicapped and elderly persons. Limited funding -- only 50 % of the appeal has been covered -- is preventing the operation from reaching its target of one million beneficiaries.*

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## ***The context***

Severe weather conditions continued throughout the four countries in January, with milder temperatures towards the end of February. However, colder weather returned in March, bringing heavy snowfalls across Belarus and western parts of Ukraine and Russia. Overnight temperatures dropped to between  $-10^{\circ}\text{C}$  and  $-14^{\circ}\text{C}$  (in Siberia, temperatures remained around  $-32^{\circ}\text{C}$ , day and night).

Although the economies in both Belarus and Russia reportedly grew during the first three months of the year, incomes have not increased correspondingly. In Belarus, attempts to keep inflation down have not met with much success. In mid March, a 10% jump in inflation has affected people on fixed incomes, particularly pensioners, whose incomes are on or below the poverty line.

In Ukraine, long delays in payments of salaries and pensions have meant that the social situation remains critical. Only 2% of the population describe their income as adequate, while two thirds claim their circumstances range from bad to very bad. To keep inflation down, the government pursues a firm monetarist policy, cutting social expenditure to a minimum. Health care receives only 30% of the budget required. Foreign borrowing is overstretched, with the external debt close to 50% of the GDP.

In Moldova, the economic crisis has been exacerbated by natural calamities. On the night of 25-26 February, landslides across an area of more than 2 sq. km destroyed 218 houses and left about 900 people, including 360 children, homeless. The National Society responded to the emergency, with Federation support.

Irregular payment of wages and pensions continues to create major difficulties for the population. Delays vary from three to six months, causing extreme economic and social hardship. The average salary is two times below the minimal consumer basket (MCB); half the income must be spent on rent and other fixed charges. On average, pensions cover only 17 % of the MCB. Up to 80% of Moldova's population have incomes below the poverty line, calculated at 60% of the MCB.

## ***Red Cross/Red Crescent action***

### **Belarus v**

During January, more than **11,000** people received second hand clothing.

In February, most of the activities initiated in January were continued thanks to funding from the Swiss Red Cross and the Norwegian government. The distribution of **11,700** food parcels was completed. The second lot of food parcels will be sent to the regions in mid March. As planned, they will be distributed to the same beneficiaries.

Soup kitchens in the six largest cities, which have served **26,160** meals to date, continue to function, each feeding an average of 60 people daily.

In February, a tender was opened for 148,000 syringes, to provide 438 Belarusian Visiting Nurses with sufficient syringes for one year. (Approx. 330 syringes for each nurse).

A Swiss Red Cross consignment of second hand clothing and household materials for the Medical and Social Centres of the Belarus RC arrived in mid March. Customs procedures are in progress.

A computer and copier were purchased for the Belarusian RC HQs, to improve co-ordination of the WEA in the country.

The Belarusian Red Cross has raised **US\$ 44,000** locally for the Winter Appeal.

### **Russian Federation v**

#### ***Soup kitchens***

The RRC branches have agreements with local canteens in all regions to serve a full meal to beneficiaries. The average price per meal is 6.80 RUR (US\$ 1.13). A total of 16 soup kitchens are in operation in all nine regions. During January and February, they served a total of 33,401 hot meals. The number of beneficiaries is 5,349; the number of "food coupons" given to individuals varies from a one-day ration to a two-week ration. The number of hot meals served in a month has thus increased (from 15,640 in December 1997). The target figure remains 25,000. The allowance has been increased to US\$ 1,500 per soup kitchen, and a tighter price frame per meal is being applied.

#### ***Second hand clothes***

All nine regions have received one to four truckloads of second hand winter clothes, depending on their requirements, and these have been sorted and distributed. According to preliminary reports, over 150,000 beneficiaries have received clothes as part of the WEA operation. During January and February another 43 Mt was received, bringing the overall total to 449 Mt. The major donor is the Swedish Red Cross.

Co-operation between the local RRC branches and the authorities has been smooth, apart from a few exceptions. Customs clearance has improved considerably. Donors have been asked to send more winter outdoor clothes.

#### ***Food parcels***

The distribution of the first pilot lot of **9,000** family food parcels was completed at the beginning of January.

All members of the WEA task force travelled to all regions in January and February in order to negotiate and sign new contracts for the procurement of the 21,000 family food parcels that will complete the first round of distributions (30,000 parcels). Despite the threat of increases from all producers, the team succeeded in maintaining the former prices of three of the suppliers and finally reduced the price per parcel of the two remaining suppliers.

Five purchasing contracts were signed and the **21,000** food parcels were produced and delivered to the nine RRC branches in January and February . According to reports, **20,927** food parcels have been distributed to **12,302** families (49,532 beneficiaries).

New tenders were sought for the procurement of family food parcels for the second and third rounds (a total of 60,000 food parcels). Suppliers were identified by mid February, with three out of five producers remaining the same as for the first round.

The average price per food parcel has been reduced significantly, by US\$ 0.68, giving a savings of more than US\$ 20,000 for the second round of 30,000 family food parcels.

The RRC should be able to start the second distribution round this month and the third in late April. Some of the November-December delay has now been caught up, although the food parcels distribution is still more than a month behind schedule.

### ***Reports***

There has been great difficulty in receiving distribution reports from the field, due to poor communications with some remote areas ("rayons" may be up to 500 km away from a regional centre; fax machines have been installed only in the regional RRC "head-offices"). During individual meetings in the regions, the WEA team stressed the need for feedback. A faster, more disciplined flow of information is expected in future.

Financial reports and heightened Red Cross visibility are other areas in need of improvement. Some regions have reacted. Stickers in various sizes are regularly distributed to RRC centres.

### ***Field Trips***

Several field trips have been undertaken. In February the RRC "top-management" team accompanied counterparts from the Swedish Red Cross to Kostroma to see the WEA programme in action. Most other field trips have concentrated on the production of family food parcels and visits to distribution points.

### ***Miscellaneous***

This month, three monitors will be hired and trained to monitor the operation in the field. They will also support the local RRC branches in reporting.

### **Ukraine v**

The Ukrainian Red Cross reports that **16,485** food parcels were distributed in February. The parcels included flour, millet, macaroni, sunflower oil, canned fish or meat, and sugar. Each food parcel cost approx. US\$ 6.50 (10 Ukr. Hrivnas). The amount of food in each parcel was reduced in order to reach as many beneficiaries as possible. The Ukrainian Red Cross decided to entrust the local Committees with making local purchases in order to reduce operational costs. As a result, the content, weight and cost of the parcels vary between regions. Instructions were given that the cost of a food parcel should not exceed 10 Hrivnas.

In Zakarpattia region, in the west, food parcels were delivered to people living alone in remote mountainous districts. Since these people have limited access to shopping, the local Red Cross increased the amount of millet and sugar. Lugansk oblast could not put sugar in the parcels as it was not available in the area and high transport costs and advance payment conditions were arguments against buying it in other areas.

In Lvov region, the Red Cross opened soup kitchens instead of distributing food parcels. Hot meals have been provided to **284** beneficiaries (from the beginning of March) in both Lvov and other towns in the region.

### **Moldova v**

In February, the Moldova RC continued distributing second hand clothing. After the landslide emergency in late February the National Society sent clothing (donated by the Swedish and Danish RC Societies for the Winter Appeal) and 300 food parcels to the affected areas. Soon after, in response to a request for assistance from the National Society, the Federation Secretariat released CHF 30,345 from the Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF). The money will be used to purchase 1,500 food parcels, 450 blankets, 150 kitchen sets and 2 emergency medical kits for Red Cross Visiting Nurses in the affected district.

The Moldova RC has finished purchasing and packing **3,800** food and hygiene parcels for the first round of the WEA. The goods will be distributed in plastic bags (one for foodstuffs, one for hygiene items) and each bag will contain information on the origin of the donation.

Support from the Netherlands Red Cross (amounting to US\$ 158,000) includes funds to run two soup kitchens for 200 beneficiaries daily, an additional 5,000 food parcels, and the provision of 40 nursing kits and 9 medical equipment sets for the Moldova RC Visiting Nurses' service. The supplies arrived at the beginning of March. At the same time, a Netherlands Red Cross Delegate began a three month mission which includes supervising distributions, participating in future projects and acting as a resource person for the Moldova Red Cross.

The German Red Cross will supply Moldova with 4,000 food parcels, 5,000 hygiene parcels and 6,000 pairs of winter shoes. Purchasing is underway in Germany.

## ***Outstanding needs***

The problem of reporting has not yet been completely resolved. Although the Operational National Societies are punctilious in providing financial reports, narrative and distribution reports are often held up at headquarters.

Feedback is awaited on an application to ECHO, to obtain medical supplies for the Visiting Nurses' Service, made through the Danish Red Cross.

## ***External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media***

In Minsk, Belarus, activities with homeless people have been organised in close co-operation with social and health authorities as well as with the Ministry of the Interior. Before receiving free meals, 327 newly registered homeless people were given X-rays, and 145 people received passports enabling them to find jobs. So far, seven people have found full time jobs and four people part time jobs. Plans are underway to extend this activity throughout Belarus.

The Winter Emergency Appeal has generated steady interest from the media. The Head of Delegation has given several radio interviews, as have ONS staff.

## ***Contributions***

See Annex 1 for details.

## *Conclusion*

The WEA operation has proved to be vital throughout the region. Food and clothing, distributed through the Red Cross network, has rendered significant support to vulnerable people in all four countries.

Although the Appeal has not been completely covered or carried out on the scale originally envisaged, assistance provided so far has undoubtedly eased conditions for many homeless, handicapped and elderly people and enabled them to survive the most difficult winter period.

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