

# **ALBANIA: REFUGEE INFLUX FROM KOSOVO**

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*Albanian Red Cross/International Federation assistance is reaching 5,000 refugees from Kosovo in the Tropoje region of northern Albania. Distributions began on 2 June. So far, 45 tons of food and other relief items have been handed out.*

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## ***The context***

Following attacks by Serbian forces on villages in the west of Kosovo, particularly around the towns of Decani and Djakovic, some 8,000 ethnic Albanian people arrived in the northern region of Tropoje in Albania. The refugees had walked for 24 to 30 hours through rough mountain terrain.

By June 9, the flow of refugees had slowed to around 100 a day and remained at this level until June 15, when UNHCR reported that 365 people crossed the border. To date, there are some 8,500 refugees registered with the local authorities. The estimated total number of people requiring assistance is 10,000.

Tropoje is one of the poorest regions of Albania. The terrain is mountainous and there are severe problems with water supply and electricity. Communications are extremely difficult with only one telephone line out of the main town, Barjam Curri. The journey from the Albanian capital Tirana takes at least five hours by a poor quality mountain road which is prone to closure by mud slides. The alternative is a ten hour journey by an overcrowded ferry. Only small trucks of maximum 10-ton capacity can reach Tropoje.

A joint assessment team from the Albanian Red Cross/International Federation/ICRC arrived in the area on June 2. The ARC, with the support of the International Federation, began a relief operation immediately the scale of the movement of people became apparent, distributing seven tons of food within two days.

When it became clear that the refugees would not be returning to their homes immediately, the International Federation launched an international appeal on June 11 for CHF 3,223,000 to fund a relief operation supplying the basic food and hygiene needs of 10,000 people for four months.

### ***Latest events***

President Slobodan Milosevic of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia met Russian President Boris Yeltsin on June 16 for talks and later announced that he was prepared to re-open talks with the Kosovar Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova but not the UCK on a resolution of the current crisis. It is not yet clear whether this will also signal a halt to police attacks on Kosovo villages. President Milosevic also indicated that humanitarian organisations, including the ICRC, would be granted access to the area of recent fighting. .

Despite these developments, more refugees may be on their way to Albania. On June 15, 365 people crossed the border at Tropoje while another 1,000 were allegedly prevented from doing so.

The pattern so far in this emergency has been the arrival of large families. Once the family is settled, the men return to Kosovo. Thus the overwhelming majority of beneficiaries are women, children and elderly people, with children under 16 thought to make up between 50 to 60% of the refugee population.

In Tropoje, refugees have been accommodated in the homes of the local population. Often 12 to 20 people are living in two small rooms of not more than three sq.m. each. The population of Barjam Curri, the region's main town, has swollen from 8,000 to over 10,000 as a result of the influx. It is clear that the local population cannot sustain this burden for much longer.

It is unclear how long the refugees already present will remain in Albania. The government appears to be anxious to contain them in the north of the country; however, an estimated 1,000-2,000 refugees have now moved out of the Tropoje area. At least 600 refugees are in the coastal town of Durres receiving Albanian Red Cross assistance.

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

At present the Albanian Red Cross/International Federation are running a relief operation for the refugees in the Tropoje area, providing food and non-food commodities to beneficiaries identified by the local authorities. The International Federation is supporting the ARC with three delegates (two logistics and one information delegate) working in Tropoje alongside the Albanian Red Cross head of disaster preparedness and representatives of the local ARC branch.

To date, the ARC and the International Federation have distributed over 45 tons of food, a ton of washing powder, 740 mattresses and blankets, nearly 2,700 bars of soap and 110 towels, reaching nearly 5,000 beneficiaries.

The ARC/International Federation relief operation began in Tropoje on June 2 with a distribution of seven tons of food and medical supplies. The ARC's stock of emergency supplies was quickly moved up to Tropoje by road and the following food and non-food items have been distributed to some 4,600 refugees through five local authority communes (figures to June 13).

<b>Commodity</b>	<b>Quantity</b>
Flour	25.470 MT

White beans	3.22 MT
Pasta	3.064 MT
Sugar	4.982 MT
Rice	1.456 MT
Vegetable oil	3.412 litres
Washing powder	1.012 MT
Soap	2,694 pces
Mattresses	740 pces
Blankets	740 pces
Towels	110 pces

Commodities also purchased by the International Federation's Regional Logistics Centre in Zagreb are en route to the area. Sixteen 10-mt trucks arrived in Tirana on June 15 containing the following food and non-food items (valued at 365,360 DEM).

<b>Commodity</b>	<b>Quantity</b>
Towels (80 x 100 cm)	5000 pces
Toothpaste (75 ml tube)	5000 pces
Shampoo (250 ml bottle)	5000 pces
Blankets (150 x 200 cm, 50% wool)	5000 pces
Washing powder (3 kg bags)	5000 bags
Soap (100 g)	5000 pces
Luggage Straps	5000 pces
Mattresses, single with cover	5000 pces
Wheat flour	30 MT
White beans	10 MT
Sugar	5 MT
Vegetable oil	5000 litres
Oral dehydration salt	50,000 sachets
Baby food (each 500 g)	2000 packs

The Federation is also carefully monitoring the developing situation in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, where a delegate is supporting the Macedonian Red Cross and an emergency relief stock is in place.

#### • ICRC

The ICRC through its tracing delegate has set up three message centres with the Albanian Red Cross (ARC), where refugees can make contact with their relatives abroad and elsewhere in Albania. They are also co-operating with the Albanian service of VOA, to broadcast names of refugees who have arrived safely in Albania. This service reaches an audience in Kosovo. The ICRC, in collaboration with the ARC and other agencies, is also meeting the medical needs of refugees and is supplying medicines to the hospital in Tropoje.

## ***Outstanding needs***

The major needs identified by refugees are for food, mattresses, blankets, hygiene items, clothes and baby food.

The ARC is a joint participant in the contingency plan for the current emergency and a major player in the relief operation. It is the main humanitarian organisation in Albania and is well placed to meet the demands of the crisis. However, if the numbers of refugees continue to increase, and if people continue to migrate south from Tropoje, its branches will require additional support. There is likely also to be an impact on the ARC's traditional activities.

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

The local authority has so far taken charge of registering refugees but acknowledges that its capacity is limited by lack of expertise and an exact understanding of the term 'refugee' in a country where the ethnic Albanians of Kosovo are considered as Albanians. A process of re-registration is due to begin soon under the auspices of the Albanian Government's local authority ministry, alongside UNHCR. They are proposing to set up three regional centres where refugees will be registered.

UNHCR is co-ordinating the UN's emergency contingency plan and is distributing a stock of 10,000 ready to eat meals, 2,000 blankets, 200 kitchen sets and 5,000 pieces of soap. An airlift of some 150 tons of food from Sarajevo is expected within days.

OXFAM will be responsible for water and sanitation while MSF, Merlin and Children's Aid Direct have volunteered to assist in the health sector. UNICEF has distributed a limited quantity of medical supplies and soap.

The UNHCR is investigating the possibility of renovating buildings for use as collective centres and has engaged the help of a German construction company, the International Rescue Committee and Oxfam. This approach has the backing of the Albanian Government's local authority ministry.

The local authority has established a daily meeting attended by its own staff and international agencies.

An interagency forum, led by UNHCR and meeting three times a week, has also been established.

The international media are present in considerable numbers and the International Federation has been actively promoting the International Red Cross Movement's work in response to the crisis.

Briefings and details of the appeal have been given to CNN, NBC, BBC TV, APTV, WTN, Press Association, Agence France Presse, Le Monde, Boston Globe, plus daily newspapers from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Austria.

In addition, the International Federation co-operated with Dutch Channel One on the making of a 15-minute current affairs programme for its prime time slot on Monday evening (15 June).

CNN has also filmed a Red Cross distribution while Reuters TV has filmed Red Cross trucks arriving with supplies, in convoy with ARC and ICRC vehicles.

Radio interviews have been conducted for BBC Radio Five Live, World Radio Geneva and Voice of America (English language and Albanian services) and Independent Radio News (UK).

## ***Contributions***

See Annex 1 for details.

## ***Conclusion***

Renewed fighting in Kosovo may provoke a fresh movement of people, either to Tropoje or the more southern border crossing at Kukes. The ARC/International Federation/ICRC are keeping a close watch on the situation and have contingency plans in place.

Peter Rees-Gildea  
Director  
Operations Funding and Reporting Department

Renny Nancholas  
Director  
Europe Department